

Jati, transliterated as caste in English from the original Portuguese word *casta* is not only one of India's most striking social realities, but also the building block to know its social superstructure. In India, caste is considered to be the source of discrimination, injustice and ensuing conflict through ages. However, in the post-independence India, caste aberrations were sought to be corrected through the political process of social justice to the oppressed and marginalized caste groups. The book *Caste Conflict and Social Justice: the discourse and design* analyzes the fundamental issues of caste conflict arising out of the social, political and economic oppression and discrimination of the weaker and marginalized castes in the wider context of social justice. It presents one of India's most populous and politically assertive states Bihar which remained the hotbed of ideological and violent caste conflicts for decades as a case study to understand the dynamics of caste conflict.

Caste Conflict and Social Justice



Mihir Bholey

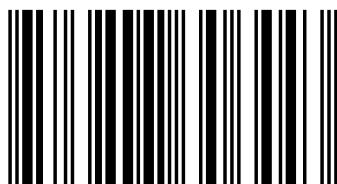
Caste Conflict and Social Justice

the discourse and design



Mihir Bholey

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Dedicated to the fond memory of my mother
Madhavi Verma
my perennial source of motivation and inspiration.

PREFACE

The discourse on caste is often fraught with the issues of status, hierarchy, dominance, backwardness and oppression among others. Democratic India not only recognized them as the major source of inequality and conflict, but also dichotomous to the very idea of democracy to which equality of men was so fundamental. To introduce the concept of equality of men irrespective of caste, creed or culture was a tough call in an inherently hierarchical society. Nevertheless, the framers of Indian constitution were keen to see that after its rebirth following independence India emerges as a modern nation and a just and egalitarian society.

Empowering the marginalized and oppressed sections of the society easily identifiable among the Backward and Scheduled castes and bringing them to the national mainstream was a way ahead to ensure social justice. Indian constitution in its preamble itself embraced three distinct types of justice – social, economic and political which may be secured by means of fundamental rights. No doubt, it was a major step to do away with inequality in an old hierarchical society stratified on the basis of caste.

In the independent India caste was co-opted by politics with both sincere and vested interest. That helped castes organize as assertive political groups and eventually as tempting vote banks too. The growing political consciousness among castes and caste groups created numerous reasons for conflict which for the sake of convenience were classified as socio-economic and political factors. Caste oppression and caste conflict were discussed like fable in the political circle in India including one of the hotbeds of caste politics – the state of Bihar.

For many years Bihar experienced its fertile countryside becoming an equally fertile land for nurturing ultra-leftist ideology to counteract the oppression and dominance of the traditionally feudal Upper castes. What followed were macabre caste conflicts full of bloodshed and massacres for decades which stopped around the new millennium, besides a parallel political assertion for transformation in the socio-economic and political power structure. The transformation made the demand for social justice a major political rallying

point particularly during the decade of nineties and which still continues. The question here is – can there be justice in the society if conflict of sorts prevails?

This book discusses the major aspects of caste conflict and social justice. And to examine the efficacy of their discourse, analyzes them in the light of the empirical data collected through the field survey in Bihar. The survey tried to gather views of the respondents from the three caste categories on various contentious issues viz. the role of caste, reasons of caste conflict, caste and politics nexus, effectiveness of caste based reservation, basis of implementing social justice etc.

As a researcher on caste conflict and social justice I had certain advantages and disadvantages too. Having born in a political family which followed socialism as a creed, one had seen how the romance with the lofty ideals of equality, social justice, classless and casteless society conjured one's mind and how the realpolitik left one crestfallen. I was always reminded of my father Arun Bholey's romantic engagement with politics and socialism since his teenage under the tutelage of the two stalwarts of socialist movement in India Jai Prakash Narayan (JP) and Dr. Rammanohar Lohia and his utter disenchantment with caste and communal politics in the later years which made him relinquish his active political life and turn to socio-political writing instead.

Lohia died in 1967 and JP in 1979. With them the vibrant political stream of socialist movement in India almost dried up. Social justice was one of the central pursuits of the socialist movement which due to the inept handling by the short sighted leaders, degenerated into vicious caste politics and conflict following the death of Lohia and JP. In his much talked about book in Hindi titled *Rajniti Meri Preyasi* (Politics My Love) my father traced the processes which led to the socio-political degeneration in independent India in the historical backdrop of India's freedom movement. However, he was certainly not the lone example, there were many like him who became disillusioned with the growing sectarian politics of caste in India since independence and its venomous fallouts.

My advantage was to be able to see the cunning and contrived corridors of politics from close proximity. I could also experience how caste feelings and sentiments were manipulated for the sake of vote bank politics; a process which still continues. To my disadvantage was the fact that my perceptions were like 'emic' accounts due to my being an inside observer of

caste politics and conflict. In order to appreciate and analyze these intricate issues however, a more detached 'etic' approach was required. It was possible only by conducting a phenomenological study of caste in the historical and contemporary perspective on the one hand and analyzing the issues of caste conflict in the context of much touted social justice on the other. Nevertheless, the discipline of social science requires empirical data to both support and reject any conception. So a field survey on caste conflict and social justice was also conducted in Bihar. My enquiry in the book is to find out can social justice prevail in the wake of ongoing caste conflict. In other words, is caste conflict not a major deterrent to social justice? My finding is an affirmative 'yes'. Caste conflict indeed is a big hurdle facing social justice and the two are not mutually quite complimentary.

I believe caste in itself is not a political phenomenon; it's a social phenomenon. But, I was always dismayed to see a social phenomenon becoming acutely political over the years. The caste-centric hierarchical and discriminatory social structure of the Indian society is no doubt incoherent with its democratic ideals of equality. Therefore, social justice has a great relevance to Indian polity as long as that itself is not used as yet another tool of social discrimination and polarization of castes. However, it could not be avoided and social justice became a frivolous political tool; a clone of divisive caste politics in the hands of the political leaders everywhere.

Leaders like Laloo Yadav who thrived on his largely Yadav-centric social justice politics in Bihar, no doubt succeeded in instilling a temporary sense of pride and self-confidence among rest of the Backward and oppressed castes in the state in his sunshine days. But on the hind side, his brand of social justice politics also led to intense caste conflict and further polarization of society on caste lines. It was later replaced by a more ingenious politics of 'social engineering' of which his arch rival Nitish Kumar, the incumbent Chief Minister of Bihar is considered to be the architect. Social engineering was Nitish Kumar's counter to the social justice politics of Laloo Yadav. In itself, it's all but a euphemism for inventing new caste equations to ensure electoral victory and yet to appear more accommodating in terms of the socio-political representation of castes. However, in either case, the engagement of politics with caste remains equally intense.

By no means this book is an attempt to present an antithesis or a counter-polemic to social justice. For the hierarchical Indian society which stratifies and discriminates people on the

basis of birth in a particular caste, social justice alone can be the governing principle to ensure equality. Caste by and large is a discriminatory system and in the name of social justice, it has been further vitiated by self seekers and their vested interest political interventions. Caste conflicts are often the outcome of a larger socio-political design. In order to ensure social justice for all, it will be thus necessary to write the obituary of caste politics in India. It's difficult to predict exactly when and how will caste become irrelevant in the Indian society. However, that's not the core issue. The real issue is to reinvent means to make the divisive politics of caste redundant and implement social justice for the entire society which subsumes all; those who are weak and marginalized traditionally and those suffering from the same syndrome presently.

I express my deep gratitude to Dr. Binod C Agrawal who guided me through this intensive research project and whose scholarship and erudition on the subject gave me the direction to deal with the debatable and dynamic phenomenon of caste conflict and social justice. I am equally thankful to my father Arun Bholey, an ardent socialist and author whose deep insight on the socio-political issues I learnt by sheer association. No less thankful I am to my wife Dr. Neeta Sinha, an academic herself, who helped me in more ways than one in the whole process of research and writing, to my children Yashvardhan Verma and Ritwika Verma and no less to my sister Nivedita Verma for all their emotional support.

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CASTE IN HISTORY

Few archaic social phenomena have shown the kind of tenacity or kept their relevance intact in the manner caste in India has. Caste as a system still pervades the Indian society and continues to be the basis of social stratification besides also determining the economic and political status of the people in more ways than one. As an institution, it still persuades its members to stick to endogamy and continues to assert and safeguard their occupational, economic, social and political interest. Its affection and deep association with politics in the contemporary times is no secret. Conflicts both ideological and violent, emanating from caste politics have added chapters into the study of Indian polity of late. Caste; an ascribed social identity of the Hindus, has now become their political identity too. So much so, that caste is now believed to be a vote bank by a large section of people and politicians and thus used for obvious political gains.

No doubt, the intermingling of politics with caste has given castes a new identity which they can now flaunt and assert to their advantage. The assertion of the *Dalit* and backward caste identity by the SCs (Scheduled Castes) and OBCs (Other Backward Classes) for their rightful place in the socio-economic and political power structure can be considered a case in point. The mobilization of the OBCs in the post-Mandal era for availing the facilities of reservation and the intermittent agitations by the *Gujjars* and *Meenas* in the state of Rajasthan recently for getting the larger share in the reservation pie further substantiates the fact that the assertion of caste identity ensures obvious political gains.

States like Bihar, which has been the hotbed of caste politics, added another important dimension of social justice which gave caste politics a kind of legitimacy and the much needed rationale. In the light of the contemporary social-political philosophy embedded into the ideals of humanism and egalitarianism, caste system appears rather retrogressive. Nevertheless, it remains an ingeniously designed social stratification of an unusual kind. Caste defies the very principle of equality on the basis of birth and hardly leaves any scope for upward or downward social mobility by choice and thus it uniquely

figures in the study of social stratification of the Indian society. So overpowering is the impact of caste on the Indian society that it's not just confined among the Hindus alone but has also taken the Indian Muslims, Christians, Sikhs in its fold. However, the Western and the modern bewilderment about caste are largely on account of the socio-political obsession with the equality of humankind whereas for the Indian civilization caste is a phenomenon rooted into its culture and largely operative norm.

Caste or *jati* as a hierarchical construct of the Hindu society is marked with overt manifestations of inherent discrimination and oppression. In its entirety, caste is a stratified social category in itself. The uniqueness of *jati* stratification lies in the differentiation of a given population into hierarchically determined classes. These classes are considered upper and lower in terms of strata and are marked with unequal distribution of rights and privileges. In the post-independence democratic India which constitutionally ensures equality of status and opportunity to all its citizens, the traditional discriminatory *jati* stratification has become a major source of conflict at the social, economic and political levels which has been witnessed on a larger spectrum in caste-ridden states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and many more.

The Religious and Historical Perspective

In India, particularly in the Hindu society, cultural refinement or the lack of it are both considered to be the typical attributes of different castes. The higher a caste ranks in terms of social hierarchy the greater its chances of being considered culturally refined. The ranks and status are defined on the basis of occupation and birth. But the freedom to choose occupation was largely denied. Hindu scriptures like *Manusmriti* consider caste an offshoot of the original *Varna Vyavastha* (*Varna* system) which stratified the society on the basis of birth from different parts of the supreme creator *Brahma's* body namely mouth, arm, thighs and feet.

The traditional Indian theory of the origin of caste goes back to the *Chaturvarna*¹ system placing the *Brahmin* at the top followed by *Kashtriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*. Each of them was allotted its distinctive duty to serve the society. So the *Brahmin* was meant to serve the society by the creation of knowledge and learning, teaching and sacrifice, *Kashtriya* by protecting the people through valour, *Vaisya* by creating wealth and finally the *Sudra*

¹ *Chaturvarna* – a Sanskrit term referring to the stratification of the Hindu society into four *Varnas* namely: *Brahmin*, *Kashtriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra* according to the *Vedic* system.

by rendering humble service to all the three. But the system was not as simple as it seems to be.

Assuming the fact that the *Varna Vyavastha* (system) was an Aryan interpolation into the multi-racial and tribal national groups like the *Magadha*, *Licchivi*, *Vaideha*, *Dravida*, *Saka*, *Kirat*, *Chandal* and others of the Indian subcontinent having its own social system, the connubial complications must have exceeded the original prescription of the *Varna Vyavastha*. Though widely discussed, debated and contemplated it's still hard to conclusively propound a consensus theory of the origin of caste.

A number of theories have been advanced to explain the origin of caste in India which may be identified as the "Traditional Theory or the "Brahmanical Theory". They all explore a probable yet dominant aspect of caste from the perspective of its origin. Consequently, there are several competing theories of the origin of caste. Today social processes of caste are too intricate and multilayered to provide a simple answer.

Is caste an ingenious social construct or an ingenious social evolution? To find an answer to this question in itself is no less important. The history of caste in India presents a rather blurred picture with lots of interpolations and extrapolations used in justifying its divine status or defining its origin. As an ingenious device while it succeeded in creating occupational stratification by recognizing a range of occupational groups, it didn't ascribe equal status to the various occupational groups. All the theories pertaining to the origin of caste are either intelligent conjectures or historical constructs based on perceived evidences. The certainty about caste is not its origin but its existence. It's often maintained that caste has its origin in *Varna* which though started as a class but later due to its religious sanctions acquired a kind of rigid social distinction.

Varna is arguably a confusing concept and doesn't clearly explain the concept of caste. The concept of *Varna* itself has changed several times during the *Vedic* period. *Rig Veda* (written in circa 4000 BC) used the term *Varna* purely in the connotation of colour and in order to differentiate between the *Arya* and the *Dasa* on the basis of their fair and dark colour. Nevertheless, during the *Rig Vedic* period itself the *Aryan* society began to divide among three distinct groups which *Rig Veda* refers to as *Brahma*, the *Kshtra* and the *Vis* which meant the priestly and literate, the warriors and the rest or the commoners. There was no reference of *Sudra* till this point of time. What is found instead is the reference of

Ayogya, *Chandal* and *Nishad*; all three despised by the *Aryans*. It is much later that in one of the famous hymns of *Rig Veda* named *Purusha Sukta* the reference of the *Chaturvarna* society is found which includes the *Sudra*. *Purusha Sukta*, one of the Hindu scriptures explains the creation of the world by sacrificing the primeval man the *Purusha*. His body was so divided that his mouth became *Brahmin*, arms *Kashtriya*, thighs *Vaisya* and feet *Sudra*. *Shlokas* (hymn) 31 and 32 of *Manusmriti* (The Laws of Manu, Chapter 1) state that for the sake of prosperity of the world, he (the God) caused the *Brahmin*, the *Kshatriya*, the *Vaisya* and the *Sudra* to proceed from his mouth, his arm, his thighs and his feet (*Shloka* 31). Dividing his own body the Lord became half male and half female; with that (female) he produced *Viraj*. (*Shloka* 32)

Among the four creations the first three were called ‘*Dwija*’ or the ‘twice-born’ as their male members had to go through the initiatory rebirth while the *Sudra* was left as ‘once-born.’ The origin of this hymn as being an original *Rig Vedic* hymn is although often contested by many scholars and considered to be a later interpolation. The class division in the *Aryan* society might have gone parallel to the evolution of *Varna* system and thus *Varna* may have become more classified and rigid than its original stratification based on division of labour. The *Arya* and *Dasa* conflict was also another reason for the gradual conversion of *Varna* into caste.

The vanquished *Dasas* were not only included into the *Aryan* fold but were ascribed the status of the *Sudra* who were marginalized and also converted into a kind of social surplus. Roy (1979) believes that the first class division of the world was the master and the slave in which the latter always belonged to the vanquished group. After being absorbed into the *Aryan* fold the *Sudra* like any other captive slave were placed at the bottom of the social pyramid. So while their number rose, their status didn’t correspond with the rise.

What is important here is to note the fact that even within the *Aryan* fold the original threefold *Varna* division existed which relegated the *Vaisya* a lower status so much so that the *Aitaraya Brahmin* called them as tributary to another and to be suppressed at will. It was expected of them to take up manual labour and serve the two higher *Varnas* as well as produce surplus to sustain the two. The fact that the *Aryans* absorbed other defeated tribal groups even though at a lower level indicates the fact that the concept of

untouchability had not touched the social psyche and the society largely remained stratified as class based on the division of labour.

Srinivas (1962) holds the view that the fourth *Varna* was not a group of either untouchable or social outcast rather belonged to the peasants, labourers and servants who not only served but also cooked for their masters. During the early period of *Vedic* age the mobility between *Varnas* was not unusual because of its largely occupational nature. However, later as the civilization moved from the *Vedic* (4000 BC-1000 BC) to the *Brahmanic* period (230 BC-700 AD) the *Chaturvarna* started becoming rigidly hierarchical placing the *Brahmin* at the top of the social echelon followed by *Kashtriya*, *Vaisya* and finally the *Sudra*. There is no doubt the *Varna* system doesn't fully correspond with the traits of the *jati* or caste system, nevertheless, as Fuller (2003) observes:

“The Vedic verse's fourfold varna system represents a spiritually authoritative model of Hindu society as a complimentary hierarchy: a unity constituted by ranked class, each with different functions necessary to sustain the whole. For understanding the caste (*jati*) system, the varna system is important mainly because it serves as an ideal religious model for the former.” (Fuller, 2003: 479)

Caste seems to be an outcome of the socio-religious evolution of the Hindu society however the social documentation of its evolution is not separately available and thus it's often extrapolated from the religious scriptures itself. There is no separate document to explain such an important process of the evolution of castes. But there is a vast resource of religio-legal scriptures collectively known as *Dharmashastra* which talk about the rights and duties of different *Varna* according to their hierarchical order. Among them *Manusmriti* (the Laws of Manu) has a special place which apart from framing laws for the overall governance of the society also talked about *Varna* and *jati*.

According to *Manusmriti* which took its final shape nearly two thousand years ago, the untouchables were created out of the hypogamous (*Pratilom*) marriage between *Sudra* men and higher class women. He then goes on to enumerate the list of different

categories created out of the *Anulom* and *Pratilom* (Hypergamous and Hypogamous) marriages which the Brahmanical order tried to place within the existing *Varna* system.

Since there is no concrete evidence to trace the origin of caste system therefore many contemporary scholars have decided against the speculative discussion. Although despite that different theories have continued to perpetuate its discussion on different basis such as the one given by Risley (1915) who based his theory on his study of racial origin and scientific anthropometric data. Risley made the *Chaturvarna* thesis the basis of his own analysis of the origin of caste. Inter-marriage between the higher and lower *Varna* seem to be the take off point of his discussion on the creation of castes. Risley (1915) observed:

“The men of the three higher groups might marry women of any of the groups below them, and if the wife belonged to the group next in order of precedence the children took her rank and no new caste was formed. If, however, mother came from a group lower down in the scale, her children belonged neither to her group nor to their father’s but formed a distinct caste called by a different name. Thus son of a Brahman by a *Vaisya* woman is an *Ambastha* to whom belongs the art of healing; while if the mother is a *Sudra*, the son is a *Nishada* and must live by killing fish.” (Risely, 1915: 258-59)

Shloka 8 in Chapter X of *Manusmriti* explains the above arrangement under the *Varna* system stating: from a *Brahmin* with the daughter of a *Vaisya* is born a son called an *Ambastha* with the daughter of a *Sudra* a *Nishada*, who is called a *Parasava*.

There is yet another example of such a marriage mentioned in *Shloka* 9 of Chapter X of *Mnausmriti* in which the father is a *Kashtriya* and mother a *Sudra* and thus the offspring is called “*Ugra*” who has the traits of both his parents and is ferocious like a *Kashtriya* and takes delight in cruelty. These are however examples of *Anuloma* marriage in which the father marries the woman of a lower group in the *Varna* hierarchy. Contrary to this is the system in which the woman of a higher social group marries a man of a lower group. The example of this is a marriage between a *Brahmin* woman marrying a *Sudra* man and the offspring is the outcast of the extreme kind called *Chandal* as he is the outcome of *Pratiloma* marriage.

It's interesting however to note that in the later phase of the civilization when caste system settled down as a social reality the *Anuloma* and *Pratiloma* marriages didn't create new caste but accepted the offspring as the member of his father's caste at times with some contempt. In the contemporary times such marriages are now accepted as a norm and the largely patriarchal system assimilates the offspring in their father's own caste without any resistance or difficulty. The various theories of the creation of castes based on *Anuloma* and *Pratiloma* marriages also don't explain the process of the creation of castes to full satisfaction. Outcasting the offspring from the family of his orientation and let him become member of a new caste can only happen when the process is rather rampant because an individual can't perpetuate the new caste unless he creates his own family of procreation within an existing endogamous group.

This concept of matrimonial fusion and subsequent fission arises many further questions such as how prevalent the *Anuloma* and *Pratiloma* marriages were at that time, looking at the multiplicity of castes it seems the process must be widely prevalent, and if so, then how such strong social sanction could be imposed against it? It's also not quite clear whether it was an outcome of a widespread forceful concubine of a polygamous society which the *Brahmanical* order tried to assimilate within the fold of the *Varna* system. The sanction is not as much against the act of marriage as against the outcome thereof. Therefore, forceful concubine in case of *Anuloma* and willful elopement in case of *Pratiloma* marriage seem to be more likely. The lack of proper historical evidence creates more possibilities of interpretation than giving a definite idea.

The theory of racial intermixing, the hegemony of the victorious over the vanquished, concubine, polygamy, religio-legal system, the Pre-Aryan social system everything has something to offer to develop the understanding of the origin of caste in India. The most accepted theory of the *Varna* system underscores it as a religious process of creating social stratification in a multi-racial society. But we can also not overlook the possibility of its originally being a kind of rather secular stratification based on the division of labour according to the temperament and makeup of the individuals or social groups of the ancient Indian society. Initially it could have been acquired rather than ascribed.

In the Hindu religious scriptures there are references of *Brahmin* like Dronacharya, Kripacharya and Vishwamitra who besides performing their Brahmanical duties also performed the duties of a *Kashtriya* and indulged into wars. Stratification is a social

reality and original *Varna* system would have been a social mechanism to stratify the society of its time. The system interestingly laid more emphasis on the duties of the various *Varna* rather than on their rights. The duties were no less stringent for the *Brahmin* rather more as they acquired the highest position within the stratification. It was observed that those not performing their duties well will have to pay the retribution in their next life.

Later with the codification of Hindu laws and rituals and consequent acceptance of the concept of rebirth the *Varna* stratification was also interpreted as the outcome of the acts of past life. Prescription of endogamy by the scriptures like *Manusmriti* only made the system even more rigid in terms of social mobility, interaction and acceptance. However, notwithstanding all its virtues and vices the *Varna* system and its largely believed subsequent evolution into *jati*, it was probably the only institutional means to maintain the Hindu civilization at that point of time.

THE MODERN AND WESTERN APPROACHES TO CASTE

In the Indian society caste has a civilizational context. It can be analyzed in the perspective of the Indian civilization and its institutions. Agrawal (1982) talks of the six probable typologies to study the nature of Indian civilization and its institutions including caste under Western and Indian models namely: The Atomistic Model, The Dichotomy Model, The Institutional Model, The Indologic Model, The Mobility Model and The Regional Model. Under the Western Model the Institutional Model studies caste as the most unique and interesting institution comparable to the concept of “class” in the western world. He asserts most of the anthropological studies focused on the study of caste particularly by the western anthropologists within the given framework of “Institutional Model”.

The western interest in the study of caste as an institution is also visible from the fact that as compared to the Indians the Americans have been more interested in researching on the institution of caste. Perhaps there is also a certain degree of problem with the various analytical approaches and models developed to analyze the institution and the system of caste. Most of them seem to be concerned with the structure and function of caste which are its overt manifestations as compared to the very purpose and rationale behind the evolution of this unique institution. As a result, the discourse on caste often fails to shift from the orbit of hierarchy, oppression, discrimination and conflict and acquires a kind of negativity which shuts the door for questioning the very rationale and larger purpose of caste which despite being hierarchical certainly can not always be oppressive.

It’s interesting that while a great deal of theoretical and ideological explorations have been made to establish the existence and purpose of communal harmony, explorations to establish harmony between castes are largely conspicuous by their absence in our socio-political discourse. Such an approach has been detrimental to understand the very desirability of caste which would not have evolved without having the larger purpose of creating and maintaining social cohesion as well.

The western interest in the anthropological study of India in itself is not a new phenomenon. Wadley (1998) observed that the US anthropological interest in India coincided with the Indian independence. Nevertheless, India was not unknown to the students of culture prior to 1947. Even as early as 1800 American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan had written about the Dravidian kinship and in the early 1900s German sociologist Max Weber had examined Hinduism as a case study to explore the impact of ideology on society.

Caste as a system of social hierarchy deeply rooted into religious foundation of the Hindu society was a strange kind of social stratification for the western intellectuals. Post 1940s when the western attention moved away from the study of “simpler” societies to the “complex” societies the study of “caste” grabbed major attention. Wadley (1998) observed:

“Having initially sought the seemingly simplest societies for investigation of the ‘Other,’ the Euro-American imagination was captured by the hierarchy found in India. Further, Hindu textual traditions such as the Purusa model supported the placement of the Brahmins at the top of the hierarchy in marked contra-distinction to hierarchies based on economic superiority that were developing in the west.” (Wadley, 1998: 117-118)

The traditional Hindu view of social hierarchy looks at caste as divinely ordained system deeply embedded into the concepts of purity versus pollution, ranking by birth, mutual suspiciousness and thus not open to change in the status. As against that, the western concept of social hierarchy is more of economic, occupational and racial in nature. During the 1950s and 1960s Wadley (1998) observed America was fighting its own “caste” cum racial stereotype wars and in comparison to the situation in India they felt somewhat better off.

Nevertheless, the religious overtone of the *Varna* system in the study of caste cannot be ignored. Caste as a group is a social group too involved in various economic, cultural and political activities happening on the social plane and thus the question about its being a social or religious group always arises. The question becomes all the more relevant in the light of the fact that the prime scripture of the Hindus the *Vedas*

which is the source of all the Hindu wisdom do not have the reference or discussion on caste.

Dumont (1980) in his book *Homo Hierarchicus* tried to explain the phenomenon of caste from the perspective of a western scholar. He stressed that caste hierarchy is in fact deeply embedded into a distinct religious ideology of hierarchy. In *Homo Hierarchicus*, Dumont underscored the mutual antagonism between ‘purity and ‘pollution’ and looked at it as the core of the caste system. That makes the concept of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ so relevant to the study of hierarchy. Besides that he also pointed out that power is an equally important aspect incorporated within the system. According to him between the given religious status and the acquired politico-religious power in terms of hierarchy the former acquired the higher position under the *Varna* system.

Dumont tried to analyze the social hierarchy in the institution of caste from a structuralist point of view where different castes formed different layers of the structure, distanced from each other, yet interacting within a given system. He found caste system as an interesting example to study the alternative models of social hierarchy which was holistic, hierarchical, drew upon religious ideology as against the western society stratified on the basis of class having its base in economic interest and relation, which is individualistic and yet egalitarian in spirit. Caste, due to its strict social stratification doesn’t easily allow upward or downward mobility. Referring to Max Muller Dumont (1980) said:

“Max Muller, whose theory of the origin of caste is complex, admits that it is essentially a question of a particular form of distinctions relating to birth, social situation and degree of education, as are known in all societies. The contrast with Europe consists in the religious justification, added to the social rules for the greater profit of the Brahmans. Rather like the Abbe Dubois, Max Muller thinks that the institution is doubtless well adapted to the circumstances and that ‘if it were destroyed overnight [very likely] more evil than good would ensue’.” (Dumont, 1980: 25)

The western approach to caste presents a rather more secular analysis of caste system. So they often look at the hierarchical character of caste as its social justification.

Kroeber (1930) for example, considered caste as a class which is conscious of itself as being distinct and has closed boundaries. This also gave birth to the idea of caste being a closed class. He defined caste as “an endogamous and hereditary sub-division of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank or social esteem in comparison with other sub-divisions.” [Kroeber, 1930: 254]

To him castes are special forms of social classes which at least as a tendency are present in all societies. This is an acutely functional approach which ignores other important aspects such as the aspect of relative inequality which is inherent in the caste system. In the process of explaining caste the concept of caste being a special kind of guild also emerged as a justification to the social theory.

Among the western Social Anthropologists there is certainly an obsession to analyze caste in the context of a parallel western system which does not give as much credence to the role of religion in creating social stratification as Indians do. Hutton on the other hand took a departure and tried to explain caste in terms of so called ‘primitive peoples or simpler societies’. Hutton (1961) stressed on the primitive conception of *mana* as the basis of castes. According to him *mana* is a mysterious impersonal power attached to individual, objects, and places. *Mana* is regarded as a power which can harm people. Caste surely didn’t emerge out of a well planned design on a particular day in the history of Indian civilization. It rather evolved out of various social processes simultaneously working upon each other. Therefore, explaining caste by its traits is a better process of understanding it.

Indian Views on Caste

Ghurye (1932) in the beginning of his seminal book *Caste and Race in India* said:

“It appears to me that any attempt at definition is bound to fail because of the complexity of the phenomenon. On the other hand, much literature on the subject is marred by lack of precision about the use of the term. Hence I propose to give the description of the factors underlying this system of caste.” (Ghurye, 1932: 1)

Perhaps Ghurye was trying to break away with the western obsession to reduce a complex phenomenon into definition for the reason which was his own cultural rootedness and understanding. However, Bose (1996) rightly pointed out that “Ghurye’s

description of caste itself systematized and organized according to certain procedures which typically characterize the colonial discourse on caste” [Bose, 1996: 64]. He further said that Ghurye characterized caste by the following elements which are:

- 1) A certain notion of Hinduism
- 2) Allegiance to racial theory
- 3) Search of certain universalistic feature of caste in terms of status
- 4) An acute focus on the boundary and divisions and subdivisions within caste groups resulting in the view that sub-castes are the “real” castes and
- 5) The future direction of castes

Thus, for Ghurye the social philosophy of caste as part of the traditional Hindu society unaffected by the modern concepts of rights and duties can be identified with (a) division (b) hierarchy (c) embargo on feeding and social interaction (d) civil and religious impediments and privileges of different sections (e) lack of unrestrained choice of occupation and finally (f) restrictions on marriage. Ghurye’s description presents the overview of castes by its characteristics.

Any discussion on caste cannot be complete without taking into account Srinivas’ concept of *sanskritization* in the context of caste system in India. It explodes many myths about caste and particularly the one which describes it as an immobile and unprogressive system. To counter this largely prevalent idea he brings into discussion the theory of *sanskritization* which points out the adoption of the higher caste traits by the lower castes. Srinivas (1959) believed that *sanskritization* was a widespread cultural and social process prevalent among Hindus and also certain tribal groups such as Bhils and Oraons across India. He explained *sanskritization* as a process whereby:

“a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently “twice born” caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community. The claim is generally made over a period of time, in fact, a generation or two, before the “arrival” is conceded.” (Srinivas, 1959: 6)

However, it is also important to note here that *sanskritization* may lead to upward mobility of a particular caste which may sometime also occur because of other socio-political-economic reasons, the policy of reservation, political realignment of castes among others, as it has happened among several dominant OBCs (Other Backward Classes) and Scheduled Castes such as Yadav, Kurmi and Paswan of Bihar. Many among them have become socially, politically and economically much better off. But this change still doesn't affect the caste structure in anyway, in other words the change is more 'positional' rather than 'structural'. The process of *sanskritization* still fails to replace or even make any dent in the wider umbrella of *Varna* system.

A Hindu is thus stratified under a two-tier system of *jati* (caste) and *Varna*. Srinivas' concept of caste also points out some interesting aspect of the phenomenon. There is no doubt that caste is a pan-India phenomenon, but equally interesting is the fact that *Varna* is still more pervasive than castes as the latter is more localized. Each caste can be recognized and placed in the existing hierarchy on the basis of the nature of their profession as recognized by the *Varna* system.

The process of *sanskritization* is also quite region specific and the lower castes not only try to emulate the higher but also the other dominant castes in the region. Srinivas has admitted the fact that that his concept of *sanskritization* was in fact based on the Brahmanical model of *sanskritization* and that there may be *Kashtriya*, *Vaisya*, *Sudra* models as well. Srinivas (1989) refers to Pocock who points out to the *Kashtriya* model:

“Just as *Kashtriya* or King stands with the *Brahminas* superior to the *Vaisya* and *Sudra* *varna* so we may also speak of the kingly model in the Hindu society which is complementary to, though dependent on certain respects upon the Brahmanic. At any given place or time the Kingly model is represented by the dominant political power in any area and is mediated by the local dominant non-Brahmin caste or castes of that area. Thus in secular matters the Moghuls and the British at various time have provided a standard by which the secular prestige is gauged.” (Srinivas, 1989: 7)

However, it's important to note here that the process of *sanskritization* also points out to the typical 'dominant class syndrome' which allures most of the castes and which

most of the castes want to emulate. For example, emulating the kingly or feudal traits or behavior influences all castes across the caste spectrum.

Sanskritization may also be analyzed in the context of ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ a fundamental concept defining caste. Purity itself is a relative concept as it makes certain castes ‘pure’ while a sizeable number of castes ‘polluted’. The pinnacle of the caste system is the purest and occupied by the *Brahmin* whereas the bottom is polluted. Paradoxically, the foundation of purity is polluted!

As per the traditional order the high caste purity is maintained by the low caste untouchables as they clear the night soil of the high caste, the dead animals and do other filthy works. However, this doesn’t mean that the vast slot in between has nothing to do with the ‘purity’ and ‘pollution’ concept. As a matter of fact, it runs through the entire spectrum and then all castes are mutually ranked by the degree of their relative purity. It is based on food habits (vegetarian / non-vegetarian), feeding relationship and acceptance of food. The low ranking can accept cooked food from the high ranking but not vice-versa. Berreman (1967) found some positive attributes in caste stratification as he observed:

“an important point that has been largely overlooked by analysts that caste systems are more than simply unusually rigid systems of stratification. They are also systems of cultural pluralism, maintained by enforced differential association among culturally distinct groups. Consequently they have distinct and common attributes not shared by non-caste system of stratification.” (Berreman, 1967: 35)

Berreman presented a different and somewhat uncommon view of caste which looks at the uniqueness of caste stratification from the perspective of cultural homogeneity. Each caste in India can be seen as a separate cultural group and the uniqueness of caste system may be found in maintaining the diversity of the cultural identity and continuing the stratification.

Any study about or related to caste system requires some acquaintance with the evolutionary process of caste. The numerous studies on caste are in fact the endeavours made by the Indian and Western Social Scientists to develop a conceptual understanding of its evolutionary process and eventually the role and function performed by caste as a

social system. Since the origin of caste is subject to multiple theoretical assumptions and interpretations, it's easier to explain caste and caste system than to define it in some conclusive terms. At the same time, contrary to the common belief, caste seems to be a dynamic social phenomenon rather than a fossilized social group. The plethora of discussions on the socio-political and economic dimensions of caste which lead to caste conflict clearly indicate that. One of the striking differences between the Indian and Western approaches to caste is that while the earlier tries to analyze caste and caste system largely in the socio-religious context, the latter scrutinizes caste in the western perspective of class structure based on hierarchy and status. However, the source of their bewilderment lies in the fact that while class is an acquired status, caste status is entirely ascribed. is on the basis of an intelligent extrapolation of the given historical facts and circumstances it can safely presumed to be an offshoot of the *Vedic* system of *Varna Vyavastha* which would have begun to evolve during the *Vedic* and *Later Vedic* period.

Reformist and Radical Views on Caste: Gandhi and Ambedkar

Over the centuries, caste rigidities and discrimination grew even stronger. Thus, the resentment against caste rigidity and discrimination and its opposition on the ideological plane also grew in similar proportion in the modern India. The socio-religious reform movement or the Indian renaissance articulated this issue with the avid social reformers of the age. At a later stage Gandhi's mission of the emancipation of the untouchables whom he called *Harijan*² stirred the society to rethink. Coward (2003) gave an interesting account of the two champions of the cause of untouchability - Gandhi and Ambedkar, and pointed out how they differed in their approach despite having similar concern for the *Harijan*.

Whereas Gandhi wanted to amend the aberration in the *Varna* system which propagated discrimination on the basis of ancestral occupation, Ambedkar proposed to annihilate castes by denouncing the *shashtras* (religious scriptures) and the concept of their divine origin. Gandhi always agreed that *shashtras* had lots of interpolations and aberrations but that didn't devoid them of their eternal message of goodness. He accepted the

² The term *Harijan* or the children of God was first coined by Mahatma Gandhi out of his compassion to restore the dignity of the oppressed untouchable castes of India and bring them back into the mainstream of the Hindu society. He even founded and edited the English Journal named *Harijan*, also published in Hindi and Gujarati.

eternal spiritual message of the *Vedas* and other scriptures while agreeing that the message must appeal to conscience and reason. Ambedkar was more politically inclined and thus wanted to bring the untouchables into the mainstream of politics. Gandhi seemed to be more traditional and moderate in his approach towards untouchability while Ambedkar seemed more radical. He thus wanted to integrate the untouchables into the Indian society in the modern way.

Coward (2003) quotes Gandhi's views about *Varna*, caste, untouchability and scriptures based on his theory of the understanding of scriptures:

“Caste has nothing to do with religion..... *Varna* and *Ashram* are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of *Varna* teaches us that we have To earn our bread by following the ancestral calling there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The calling of a *Brahmina* spiritual teacher and a scavenger are equal and their due performance carries equal merit before God, and at one time seem to have carried identical reward before man there is nothing in the law of *Varna* to warrant a belief in untouchability. (Coward, 2003: 58)

Gandhi believed that the worth of a religion cannot be evaluated by its aberrations but by its best practices and ideologies alone. *Varna* for him was not an irrelevant concept so long as it was not related to the sin of untouchability and he believed that untouchability is not what *Varna* system propounds. In other words, Gandhi through the concept of *Varna* was trying to underscore the dignity of labour which was missing in the Hindu society and the opposite of which was reinforced by the caste system. The Jat-Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore was not convinced with Gandhi's idea on *Varna* system and thus wrote a letter to him which he generously published in *Harijan* in an August 1936 issue. Coward (2003) quoted the letter of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal which wrote:

“Your theory of *varnavyavastha* is impracticable in this age and there is no hope of its revival in the near future. But Hindus are slaves of caste and do not want to destroy it. So when you advocate your ideal of imaginary *varnavyavastha* they find justification for clinging to caste. Thus you are doing a great disservice to social reform.... To try to

remove untouchability without striking at the root of *varnavyavastha* is simply to treat the outward symptoms of a disease.” (Coward, 2003: 59)

Gandhi's critics always criticize him of not being opposed to caste and *Varna*. But it will be grossly erroneous to doubt his sincerity and compassion for the upliftment of the untouchables. Ambedkar on the other hand believed in the equality of opportunity, economic, social and political status rather than the equality of all the *Varna* which Gandhi envisioned. The post-independence modern India however politically vindicated the vision of Ambedkar more than that of Gandhi. Despite their difference in approach leaders like Gandhi and Ambedkar sensitized the people towards the pitiable condition of the *Dalits* and strove hard for their emancipation through their actions and programmes in the pre-independence era.

Gandhi's untiring efforts of *Harizan Uddhar* (or *Dalit* emancipation) and programmes of removing the social evils of untouchability and restoring their human dignity influenced the social psyche and consciousness of that era. It even found reflection in the literary genre and inspired people like Mulk Raj Anand and many more. Struggle of the oppressed emerged as a dominant theme during the early phase of the twentieth century and influenced both the Hindi and the Indo-Anglian literature of the period. Whether it's Premchand's *Thakur Ka Kuan* (in Hindi), Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938), DS Ramchandra Rao's *Lakshmi's Triumph* (1935), CS Raman's *The Call of the Soul* (1942) or Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), they all reflect human spirit of emancipation from social, religious and cultural bondage and also the deep rooted desire to add dignity and honour to the fellow human beings whom the society had discarded as untouchables and outcast. During the 1930s Indian literature in the vernacular and English attained full maturity in terms of fiction writing and the medium of fiction successfully dealt with the issues of change in the light of expanding horizons of individual and national aspirations.

Lohia's Views on Caste Politics

The caste discourse which centered around Gandhi's *Harizan Uddhar* (or *Dalit* emancipation) in the pre-independence era gradually mutated into the discourse of political assertion for *Dalit* empowerment in the post-independence era. However, besides the upsurge in the *Dalit* political consciousness, the post-independence era also saw the

mobilization of the *Pichhadi Jati* or OBCs due to obvious political interventions. Ironically, the ideological dissent to caste and caste system and the concern for the emancipation of the marginalized and oppressed castes gradually turned into a kind of assent to caste politics and ensuing caste conflict in independent India. The post-independence era also experienced the emergence and assertion of the OBCs besides the *Dalit* demanding share proportionate to their number in the socio-economic and political power structure. The OBCs and SCs politics has a long tradition in Bihar. In earlier days it was championed by the socialist stalwart and national leader Ram Manohar Lohia whose discourse and views on caste need to be understood to appreciate the present day caste conflict in Bihar. His views on reservation were too radical for its time. According to Jafferlot, (2000) Lohia's Samyukta Socialist Party promoted the notion of "preferential opportunities" in its election manifesto which was justified in the following words:

"It should be remembered that equality and equal opportunity are not synonymous. In a society characterized by hierarchical structure based on birth, the principle of equal opportunity cannot produce an equal society. The established conventional notion about merit and ability must result in denial of opportunities in actual practice for backward castes harizans [Schedule Castes], adibasis [Schedule Tribes]". (Jafferlot, 2000: 4)

Lohia opposed the idea to project 'caste' as 'class'. To him both were different from each other despite being equally discriminatory in nature. He thus wanted to see the abolition of both. Nevertheless, he looked at caste as the "most overwhelming factor in Indian life". Lohia said, "Many socialists honestly but wrongly think that it is sufficient to strive for economic equality and caste inequality will vanish of itself as a consequence. They fail to comprehend economic inequality and caste inequality as twin demons, which have both to be killed." [Jafferlot: 2000: 5]

Lohia is also regarded as the mastermind behind the oppressed class politics which later on became the major political agenda of his followers and the offshoots of the Socialist Party. He believed that an egalitarian society cannot be created if birth continues to determine the status of hierarchy. His ideas on caste, equality and opportunity were contrary to Nehru's views on this matter who believed that through education and extension of democratic rights the caste based discrimination and disadvantage can be set aside.

Since Lohia held that the hierarchical structure of the Hindu society continues to be a social reality, it can only be compensated with 'preferential opportunity' extended to those who have been discriminated against on the basis of birth. Lohia was quite emphatic in his views about the rights of the socio-economically marginalized caste groups and he expressed that in unequivocal terms. His empathy for the marginalized sections of the society also included the women, children and the *adibasis* (tribal groups). His views about their well-being found a clear articulation in the 1962 election manifesto of his Socialist Party which raised the demand for reservation and other preferential opportunities for the upliftment of the backward and oppressed castes till the gap between them and the Upper Castes on account of their birth is bridged. Some of the important points related to caste and reservation in the manifesto referred by Kapoor (2008) were as follows:

1. Till the time the indicators of gap in knowledge and capability acquired on account of birth are not completely bridged women, *Sudras*, *Harizans*, tribals and the backward castes of the religious minorities should be given 60% reservation. These backward classes constitute 90% of the population whereas their representation at higher positions is only 5 and 10%.
2. Inter-caste marriage between the *Diwjas* and *Adwijjas* (Upper and Lower Castes) should be considered as an eligibility criteria for government service. In certain areas community inter-caste feasts should be organized at least once or twice in a year.
3. The special facilities of scholarships and hostels should be augmented for all the members of the backward classes. Number of schools and colleges should be increased. If required, evening and night schools and colleges should be run. But the reservation should not be against the students of Upper Castes. With regard to education the state shall not close the doors to anybody; however, the state will presume that if the Upper Castes students do not come under the 40% limit, then they will find some other way out. (Kapoor, 2008: 575-76, Translated from Hindi)

Lohia's political scheme of things and his apparently empathic overtures towards the oppressed and marginalized castes made him quite a popular leader among the OBCs. He emerged as the rallying point of the backward caste politics and certainly helped in the

consolidation of the OBCs as a politically dominant caste group in states like Bihar. Though some of his followers and colleagues differed and privately disagreed with his fixation to 60 and 40 percent in the context of caste based reservation and his views of replacing English with Hindi considering the linguistic diversity and ethnocentricity about language in India. But he was not convinced. His socialism was too deeply rooted in his understanding of the social reality of India which was hierarchical and discriminatory so he preferred to look at 'caste' as a separate social reality which could not be equated with 'class'. Kapoor (2008) writes that while enumerating the four shortcomings of Asian politics Lohia mentioned the use of religion, caste, family and language being used as one of the means of politics in Asia which was faulty.[Kapoor, 2008: 70] This reflects Lohia's world view which influenced both his political creed and programmes. However, the gravitational force of caste in Bihar was such that all his political thoughts and programmes got sucked into the black hole of caste politics. The days which followed his demise subverted his socialist ideals into a kind of politics which became reservation-centric and made the state the hot-bed of backward class reservation politics. The true socialist ideals of the 'caste and classless society' were really lost somewhere midway.

CASTE CONFLICT IN A CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Caste conflict and social justice in India and in the state of Bihar has been a major issue of socio-political discourse. Caste oppression and conflict at the social and economic level had been a major concern in India even during the pre-independence days. In the post-independence era it became a political issue too. Bihar experienced the worst kind of caste conflict and polarization over the years which further accentuated in the post-Mandal era particularly during 1990-2000 of the Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD) rule. At a wider level, however, caste conflict can also be seen in the cross-cultural perspective in the context of South-Asia.

Although conflict arising out of caste or *jati* stratification is quite common in India, nevertheless, the occurrence can also be seen in the cross-cultural perspective of the South-Asian countries including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. In the Indian context, it is caste or *jati* which is considered to be more hierarchical than class, leading to intra and inter-caste conflicts. A substantial amount of political discourse in India deals with caste politics emanating out of power struggle, exploitation and discrimination. However, caste-based social hierarchy and oppression are also observed in the societies of the South-Asian countries mentioned above. In these countries social marginalization of people takes place in various forms – such as birth, colour, physical features, ethnicity, religion, language, occupation and kinship to name a few. In a broader sense, discrimination among people on these grounds creates similar kind of conflict situation which we find in the case of caste-based discrimination. Thus, in a way, they give us a new perspective to see caste conflict in a much wider context rather than one based on birth and social hierarchy alone.

Sri Lanka in India's neighbourhood for example suffered a most violent kind of caste conflict due to ethnic discrimination perpetrated by the majority native Sinhala against the minority Tamil settlers which led to intense ethnic conflict followed by an unjustified and condemnable spate of terrorism unleashed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Social discrimination against the weaker sections, ethnic and religious minorities including Hindus and Christians and the 'lower castes' in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan which enshrines 'Islamic brotherhood' shows the other side of the story. Being an Islamic Republic, Pakistan officially doesn't accept the existence of caste as it goes against the spirit of Islam. However, in the feudal Pakistan social stratification is as acute and discriminatory as elsewhere and in a sense much more due to the absence of strong democratic institutions. The sweepers in Pakistan, mostly belonging to the Christian community are considered 'untouchable'.

The Pakistanisni society is as familiar with the concept of '*neech zaat*' as the Indian society is and subjects them to similar discriminatory treatment as their counterparts in India did until it was made illegal under law. At the receiving end of the caste-based discrimination in Pakistan are communities like '*mussali*' (a derogatory expression for the unskilled Muslim Shaikh workers) kammi, chuhra in Punjab and their counterpart '*neech zaat*' (low caste), 'badnasal' (bad lineage) in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and '*ghulam*' (slaves) in Balochistan [Gazdar, 2007: 86]. From physical abuse to sexual exploitation, these castes or *jati* suffer all kinds of discrimination in the hands of the dominant castes of Pakistan. The concept of '*biradari*' '*jaat*' and '*quom*' (brotherhood, caste and co-religion) prevails and dominates in the Pakistani society divided on ethnic and sectarian lines.

Despite the claims of Islamic brotherhood, the Muslims migrated from India and settled in Pakistan largely around Karachi are called *Mohajirs* (the migrants) and are not openly assimilated in the Punjabi, Sindhi and Pushtun dominated Pakistan. They're also subjected to severe socio-political discrimination. The Pushtun who strongly believe in their racial superiority, consider the low caste Muslims *Toorkhail* (one of the black lineage) and *Kisabgar* as people of low moral. The minority Hindu tribes such as the Bhils, the Kolhis, the Bagris are treated like untouchables in Sindh because they are considered to eat *haram* (food forbidden in Islam) such as carrion, pork, and reptiles, which is reminiscent of the Brahmanical notions of ritual purity. [Gazdar, 2007: 87].

India's neighbor on the eastern front Bangladesh for a long time suffered the ethnic and linguistic conflict. East Bengal, as it was known before the partition of India had a unique identity of its own. It differed from the Hindus on account of religion and from the Muslims of north India on account of language as they spoke Urdu. After the

creation of Pakistan, Bangladesh came to be known as East Pakistan and was subjected to economic and political alienation in the hands of the Urdu speaking Punjabi, Sindhi and Mohajirs dominated West Pakistan. The Bengali Muslims of East Bengal had very limited representation in the Pakistani military and bureaucracy. This created a unique kind of social stratification within the Islamic society itself which became the source of socio-political conflict on linguistic basis. The oppression of the East Bengal Muslims by their western counterparts increased manifold by the 1960s. The conflict and cleavage kept growing and in 1971 with the consent of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto the then military General Yahaya Khan brutally suppressed the opposition forces in East Bengal. The death toll of the East Pakistani Muslims was estimated to be 1.5 million. This linguistic-ethnic conflict grew so much that a counter liberation army of Bengali Muslims named *Mukti Bahini* was created and which played a major role in the creation of Bangladesh as a separate nation from Pakistan.

The stratification of caste among the Christians of Kerala, it seems, similar to the Hindu caste system. They are divided into Syrian, Latin and New Christian groups in a manner quite similar to the hierarchical castes-ranked Hindu society. In Kerala Christians are differentiated based on two main criteria which include firstly the status of the caste in the Hindu society from which the original converts came from and the group to which they claim their descent belongs to, and secondly the date of their original conversion. The fundamental difference between the Christian castes and Hindus is that in certain conditions the Christians may allow upward social mobility to the individuals. Nevertheless, the Christian and Hindu behaviour with regards to the rules of caste and concept of pollution are quite similar. In some cases adopting Christianity may neutralize the concept of pollution which they seem to have imbibed from the Hindus. The striking difference is that Christians unlike the caste Hindus and the upper class Muslims in Pakistan do not carry the concept of corporal pollution. Thus “Christians and Hindus only share an orthopraxy in inter-caste relations; it does not operate within the Christian community” [Fuller, 1976:53].

Caste-based hierarchy, stratification and discrimination have influenced the Christians and the Muslims of the Indian subcontinent alike. The Muslims in India are also stratified on the lines of Upper Caste and *Pasmanda* Muslims. The vast majority of low caste Hindus even after converting to Islam ostensibly on account of social discrimination by the Upper Caste Hindus couldn't achieve higher status or equality.

They were never assimilated in the mainstream by the Muslim elites and continued facing near similar discrimination. Quite unlike the popular belief, Indian Muslims like their Hindu brethren also do not constitute a collective monolithic group. The power and authority has always been wielded by the Upper Caste Muslim elites who belonged to the Sheikh, Saiyed and Pathans. Anwar (2001) underlines the fact with the details of control of resources and Islamic institutions. Out of the total 11 members of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) 10 members belong to the Upper Class/Caste among the Muslims and there is only one member from the Backward Caste/Class. Out of the 39 Executives of the AIMPLB 36 belong to the Upper Class/Caste and only 3 belong to the Backward Caste/Class. Similarly out of the total 48 Executives of All India Milli Council 44 belong to the Upper Class/Caste and only 4 belong to the Backward Caste/Class.

The proximity with the Hindu society has certainly influenced the social set up of the Muslim community in terms of hierarchy and stratification and has created a rather deprived and oppressed lot of Muslims known as *Pasmandas*. The Muslims in India like elsewhere will apparently deny the existence of caste-based social stratification. Nevertheless, the fact remains that caste system among Indian Muslims is quite an objective reality “affecting and governing their interpersonal, social and economic, if not political, relationship, like it is in any other community of Indian society”. [Alam, 2003: 4881].

Caste as a typical social construct of the Indian subcontinent has influenced the Christians, the Muslims, the Sikhs and other religious groups and thus may be regarded as a “*cross-cultural civilizational influence*” of social dominance impacting religions and communities besides the Hindus. Despite the several socio-political and economic changes that India has undergone in the post-independence era, caste or *jati*-based social hierarchy and stratification still prevail. Social stratification of castes, together with political and economic oppression and dominance are some of the major causes of caste or *jati*-conflict.

Caste Conflict in Bihar

In Bihar castes have acquired a unique socio-political identity and a status which has further institutionalized this discriminatory system. The identity politics has also caused a deep faultline between different castes and caste groups in Bihar and also elsewhere in the

country. But the question which arises here is whether caste is the sole identity of a person particularly in the context of the contemporary social ethos of multiple identities? The enormity of secondary group affiliations of an individual in today's liberalized era often refers to caste identity with a question mark. It seems rather difficult to justify the notion of caste identity on the ideological levels as we come across the other emerging social realities. Sen (2006) presenting a counterpoint to Huntington's often quoted social theory of "clash of civilizations" underscores the complexity of human identity in the civilizational context which also gives us a new perspective to analyze the issue of caste identity as well. Sen (2006) points out that in today's context a person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theater lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, etc. He also stresses that one's civilizational identity is not one's destiny.

Does this not apply to the misleading notion of caste identity too as we see people carrying several other functional identities as well besides their caste identity? While the answer may be an affirmative 'yes' nevertheless, we find castes and caste groups becoming even more aggressive, socio-politically more organized and ready to be used for political purposes and maneuvering in the process of power-sharing. One needs to find an answer to this social enigma in the context of Bihar.

The political intervention adds a new dimension to the whole process caste conflict in Bihar which finds its reflection in the social and economic conflict besides political. These three dimensions of caste conflict and their impact on the process of social justice constitute major part of the discussion in this book. Keeping these factors in mind one may explore the evolution and function of caste in its classical and religious context so as to understand its changing role and dynamics in the contemporary era. The factors contributing to the socio-economic and political conflict of caste need to be evaluated in the light of the ongoing political discourse and empirical findings on Bihar.

A big question which arises while analyzing caste conflict and social justice is whether the continuous conflict among the various caste groups for higher social status, economic well-being, political empowerment and power sharing can lead to social justice for all. In other

words, can social justice be attained in the absence of social harmony and in the presence of perpetual conflict – an important political issue often ignored by the political class. Political discourse and empirical data however reveal that in the wake of perpetual caste conflict social justice can not be achieved.

CASTE IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Sociologists, anthropologists, social thinkers and philosophers have found caste phenomenon of great interest and relevance as it helps understand social stratification and dynamics of the Hindu society. Caste according to the widely accepted western view (Dumont *et al*) is considered to be a 'system', something which has been purposefully designed with some intent. Nevertheless, caste also seems to be a '*social construct*' - typical and most pronounced in the Hindu society. It's a creation with an interpolated set of values, roles and meanings.

Discourse: the Meaning and Nature

The Latin origin of the word discourse means running from one place to another. Semantically it refers to a participatory exchange of views, ideas which present different perspectives of an issue. As a process of communication, it goes back and forth and facilitates diverse views on similar issue. In a broader sense of the term discourse is considered a part of linguistic and semiotic study. As a linguistic category discourse is either used as a synonym for text or language, or is integrated with some of these ideas. However, when looked at from a sociological perspective, it indicates to a 'class of text'. Similarly, from the social sciences perspective, discourse may be explained as an institutionalized way of thinking, as a kind of social boundary defining what can be said regarding a particular issue.

Socio-political discourse deals with the issues of socio-political concerns which often move around assertion of rights, identity and ideologies, participation in the political system, sharing of power, exploitation and so on. In the present context, the purpose of caste discourse is to sensitize and awaken people which may be related to issues like poverty, unemployment, discrimination, caste and religious conflicts and also harmony among others. It not only discusses the problems; it may present solutions as well. It's in this context in which the discourse on caste politics may be analyzed since caste politics is one of the major issues of social and political discourse available in the form of scholarly and journalistic writings.

The discourse on caste itself is varied in intent ranging from phenomenological study to contextual analysis. It highlights and investigates the issues of caste conflict, exploitation, positive discrimination, affirmative action, empowerment of the weaker sections among other in the socio-economic and political perspectives. The discourse on caste presents a view to share new ideas, underscores the new evolving dimensions of caste politics or even tries to impress upon certain views. Assertion for caste identity, caste based reservation, social justice, social engineering for creating caste associations or federations, caste violence are some of the contemporary discourses on caste.

The Sociological and Political Discourse on Caste

The sociological and anthropological discourses on caste analyze this phenomenon from two different perspectives. Leach (1971) underscores this distinction as he says:

“In the writings of anthropologists and sociologists the word ‘caste’ is used in two different senses. In the ethnographic category it refers exclusively to a system of social organization peculiar to Hindu India, but as a sociological category it may denote almost any kind of class structure of exceptional rigidity. Such double usage is unfortunate; the tendency to stress the ‘status-group’ component of caste prejudices the whole question as what is the essential sociological nature of the Indian phenomenon.” (Leach, 1971: 1)

While stratification is a universal social phenomenon, caste is certainly a typical Indian social construct which has acquired both the characteristics. As an ethnographic category it refers to an age old tradition of Hindus, while in the larger sociological sense the rigid class stratification of caste that makes social mobility to higher status difficult. However, in order to explain caste in the anthropological context “*Jati*” more than caste appears to be a better option (Karve, 1968). The plethora of literature created by social scientists has attempted to examine and contextualize the phenomenon of caste. Ishita (2008) in the introduction of ‘Caste in History’ elaborates this:

“They have revisited, reinterpreted and restated influential formulations of the ideology of purity-pollution as the fundamental governing principle of caste, further discarding the privileging of ritual hierarchy and the superior position of the *Brahminas* untenable. Some have underscored and tried to

understand the importance of caste in the forging of new identities in politics, and in the *Dalit* self-assertion. They have also reflected on the viability of caste as a category.” (Ishita, 2008: XV)

The caste system in India in course of its evolution has acquired many dimensions. If the concept of purity and pollution is more ritualistic, stratification and identity is more social. Issue of caste identity may be essentially social in nature, but its assertion in recent times is certainly politically motivated and oriented. As an age old system it has shown remarkable endurance and resilience. According to Mazumdar and Madan (1990) the evolutionary theorists (Morgan *et al.*) held the view that stratification and centralized authority are notions prevalent in the civilized societies. Primitive societies do not accept it and believe in a more democratic system.

Sociologists like Ghurye believe that any attempt to define caste is bound to fail because of the complexity of the phenomenon. [Ghurye: 2004:1] This justifies the approach to analyze caste as a structured system of stratification which includes:

- a) a system of hierarchy and rank
- b) ascribed membership
- c) endogamy
- d) restricted contact among castes and
- e) constrained mobility (at least theoretically)

This approach certainly makes the understanding of caste easier by facilitating a kind of structured analysis of caste. However, this approach alone is not sufficient to understand and appreciate the phenomenon of caste. Caste also has a functional dimension and it performs certain functions which lead to order, stability and cooperation. This was apparent in the traditional *Jajmani* system which enshrined the cooperation and mutual dependence among castes and presented a model of order, stability and harmony. MacIver characterized caste in terms of its rigid predetermined status and stressed that when status is wholly predetermined so that men are born to their lot without any hope of changing it, then the class takes the extreme form of caste. [MacIver: 1937: 171].

The contemporary study of caste has analyzed it as a system, an institution, an ideology, a practice and more particularly as a discriminatory system. Under democratic polity it is the aspect of discrimination which has become more pronounced as it goes against the very spirit of equality; one of the main postulates of democracy. Hence, caste has also

become a subject of study by the political scientists. For the social scientists and journalists the relation between caste and politics has been a thriving concern. In the debate of tradition versus modernity caste has emerged as a concept dichotomous to secular polity. Nehru and the social scientists that followed his views and ideologies, believed that spread of education will help erode the parochial nature of caste. Ishita (2008) observed that such an idea about caste:

“allowed optimistic planners and political scientists to share Nehru’s belief that the project of nation-building which entailed a spread of education, extension of democratic rights, and implementation of development measures by a secular state, would gradually lead to an erosion of the traditional ‘parochial’ structure of caste.” (Ishita, 2008: XXVI)

Nevertheless, in the independent and democratic India caste has jumped out of the ‘cultural’ domain and has aligned with power politics. Democratic right of voting for instance didn’t remain an individual’s choice; it largely became a kind of ghettoized group choice. There’s no doubt that education among all the sections of the society has increased manifolds since independence, but it has not commensurated with the erosion of the ‘parochial structure’ of caste as expected by Nehru and the political scientists. Despite the spread of education and extension of democratic rights caste system with its aberrations not only continues but also mutates itself in the most innovative ways as per the changing political scenario. In the recent years, the centuries old social injustice was sought to be replaced by the concept of ‘social justice’ however, in the process caste has become an even more sharply polarised political issue immensely useful for electoral purpose.

‘Casteism’ though not a word found in any dictionary, became a transferred epithet in the social and political vocabulary to describe the hidebound mindset acutely confined to the interest of its own stock. The ideal political approach of caste was based on equality. But it got caught in the quagmire of politically imposed order of equality and the traditional concept of social stratification. Caste based reservation in employment, education and legislature created another confusion and debate to which the widely acceptable solution is yet to be found. Political commitment to the elimination of age old caste based discrimination through government’s policy of ‘compensatory discrimination’ further strengthened ‘casteism’. In the recent times caste is shaping and influencing political ideologies supported by a cluster of castes. Castes have begun to identify themselves with

the ideologies of different political parties. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Laloo³ Yadav and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) of Mayawati are cases in point. Somjee (1973) refers to Rudolph & Rudolph who concluded by means of their functionalist analysis that Indians had the genius for adaptation and assimilation when faced with the possibility of conflict and disruption.

Political patronage and sheltering of castes in modern India may also be looked into from this perspective. When caste reincarnates itself as a voluntary caste association internal differences and cleavages within caste system acquire political overtone. The role of political parties in such situations is to articulate these differences. It's in this sense according to Rudolphs that modern politics appears to be an instrument for both the revival and the suppression of traditional society.

Discourse on Bihar's Caste Politics

Caste politics of Bihar has generated lots of scholarly and journalistic discourses which have been largely viewed in the context of conflict at various levels; social, political, economic and ideological. These discourses have dealt with the reasons of their brutal manifestations and cunning manoeuvres. Issues like caste conflicts, untouchability, mutual distrust, reservation, social engineering for electoral gains, social justice to give voice and identity to the oppressed form a considerable chunk of the political discourse on Bihar. Although caste conflict is a Pan-India phenomena, but Bihar has seen some of the worst caste conflicts in the post-independence era.

In Bihar the discourses on caste conflict have been analyzed in the perspective of traditional hierarchy and differences, agrarian uprising and feudal mindset, in the socio-economic perspective, emerging caste equations besides other. The discourse has also highlighted the changing political realities such as reservation, rise of OBCs and SCs and their assertion for identity, larger share in power politics, opportunity of employment etc. Caste is a traditional social system in India while democratic politics is a new entrant. The dilemma of politics is that its ideals disapprove discrimination of any sort while it strengthens the existence of caste as an indispensable social reality. On the one hand democratic politics tries to combat the evils of caste system while on the other it strives to make special caste based provisions. Reflecting on this issue, Kothari (1997) took a rather pragmatic view on caste and politics interplay. He pointed out that the real issue was not

³ The name of Laloo (Yadav) is also spelt as Lalu at several places

whether caste can disappear but how caste and politics are mutually shaping each other. Kothari (1997) said:

“In dealing with the relationship between caste and politics, however, the doctrine modernizer suffers from a serious xenophobia. He begins with the question: is caste disappearing? Now, surely no social system disappears like that. A more useful, point of departure would be: what form is caste taking under impact of modern politics, and what form is politics taking in a caste oriented society?” (Kothari, 1977: 58)

He further said that:

“Politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is acquisition of power for the realization of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiances in order to mobilize and consolidate positions. The important thing is organization and articulation of support, and where politics is mass-based the point is to articulate support through organizations in which the masses are to be found”. (Kothari, 1977: 59)

Kothari (1977) seemed to believe in the indestructible nature of caste as social phenomena. Therefore he seems to be more interested in the role and function of caste and how it influences politics as a social phenomenon. His views vis-à-vis caste is more practical than normative as he looks at the nexus between caste and politics and underscores the compulsion of mass-based politics which needs number to come to power. Caste as a group provides the number and support for politics to thrive. In this process the support of caste to politics and politics to caste become mutual. However, it will be erroneous to extrapolate his views that caste is a monolithic entity and thus its support to a political group is unflinching. In fact, while politics uses caste to achieve its goals, caste uses politics to serve its own interest. In this ‘competitive enterprise’ of politics, as Kothari refers to, castes may support to different political groups who take up their cause.

The political parties in Bihar (as elsewhere) are too obsessed with this ‘competitive enterprise’ and cunningly use caste and its combinations for electoral gains. From among the Upper Castes, OBCs, SCs (and also religious minorities) different political parties carve out

different caste combinations. For example, in Bihar during his regime Laloo Yadav⁴ engineered a formidable Muslim–Yadav (MY) and *Dalit* combination which helped him rule the state for 15 years. His arch rival Nitish Kumar who succeeded the chief ministership of Bihar from him created yet another caste faction among the *Dalit* (SCs) called *Mahadalit* (or extremely oppressed). Besides the *Mahadalit* he also included in his social engineering a faction from among the OBCs identified as Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) to strengthen his caste engineering.

Changing Discourse on Caste Politics and Conflict

The discourse on caste in the pre and post independence era is remarkably different from each other in terms of emphasis. While the pre-independence discourse was largely focused on the issues of untouchability, rituals, occupation and marriages, in the post-independence era over a period of time has acquired political overtone. Beteille (2006) observed:

“If we look at the literature on caste and politics before independence, we will find very little discussion in it of caste and politics. Much more attention was paid to caste and occupation, caste and ritual and caste and marriage....The disproportionate media attention given to politics creates the misleading impression that caste as a whole is becoming stronger”. (Beteille, 2006: 97)

In the post-independence era while caste is gradually losing its traditional identity characterised by profession, caste feeling and assertions seem to be rising due to the politicisation of caste. Beteille is right in his observation that caste gets disproportionate media attention and thus seems to be emerging stronger. But media's main attention these days is primarily focussed on the politics of caste and on how different castes are used by the politicians in their 'social engineering' rather than highlighting the socio-economic conditions of different castes. In other words, it's the politics of caste rather than caste per se which media feels interested in.

Caste politics in Bihar has its own dichotomies. On the one hand the changing patterns of occupation, endogamy, approach towards purity and untouchability, industrialization, urban migration have compelled various castes to stay together at least in the urban areas. Majumder (2006) refers to M N Srinivas who argued that urbanization and industrialization have helped to break down caste barriers to some extent as people moved out of traditional occupations. But on the other, caste rigidity, assertion and intolerance have also increased

parallel due to politicisation of caste. The politics of reservation is a glaring example. Nevertheless, at the same time caste loyalties and hegemony don't completely influence the election results which are against the popular perception of caste predominance and election results in Bihar. Gupta (2000) writes, "If caste loyalties are so unswerving and rigid as they are claimed to be then they should manifest themselves in elections. Contrary to popular belief, there is just no correlation between caste numbers and voting results". [Gupta, 2000: 11] This shows a new trend of emerging social and political consciousness among caste. It behaves as a homogenous group to protect its interest and uses politics as a means to achieve its interest. However, caste also does not entirely behave as a monolithic group. When analyzed on the ultimate test stone of electoral politics it appears that caste politics is more a matter of convenience more than commitment.

Politicians in Bihar, cutting across party lines accept caste as a socio-political reality rather than a social stigma which should have been removed through political means and social campaigns. Consequently, they have worked out an ingenious method what they call 'social engineering' which in reality is a metaphor for 'vote bank politics.' The role of caste and more than that a combination of castes has proven its efficacy in the electoral politics of Bihar. Not that only politician are aware of it, this consciousness has in fact percolated down at the caste level and has resulted in political assertion. Saeed (2007) observed;

"After independence, the power of the ballot turned out to be the main motivation for the reactivation of caste identities. The Congress, the largest and most dominant party of India, went along with the caste considerations of real politik. For instance, for the sake of preserving its vote bank, Congress patronized the Harijans, by instituting reforms and offering governmental assistance. Similarly, the representatives of those castes which demographically dominated certain areas were given a place in the party hierarchy as well as in the government, which, in turn, watched their caste interests very closely. In short, caste identities, instead of being eroded, were realigned on conspicuously political lines. In a way, this development rather reinforced caste and gave an impetus to caste-based organizations and associations which transcended the local boundaries." (Saeed, 2007: 1)

A sizeable discourse on caste politics in Bihar is about the traditional socio-religious contempt against those placed lower in the caste hierarchy particularly against the extremely backward and the Scheduled Castes. But if we look at the caste mobilisation and the raising of caste armies (*sena*), they indicate that the causes of conflict now are more politico-economic in nature than just social. The caste atrocities in Bihar do not follow any fixed pattern so that we can identify its direction. It's not only top-down but also lateral and horizontal. Gupta (2000) pointed out that in Bihar, there has been no pattern at all in the political alignment of castes. Pointing out the case of atrocities in Bishrampur he reminds that the main issue there was sharecroppers' right over cultivated land and the Kurmi were the main attackers. But the Kurmi were aided by a variety of Upper Caste landlords to attack not only the Harijan, but also the Yadav who are closer to them and traditionally considered to be of the same rank. But in Belchi, there attack was on the Brahmin, the kingpin of the true hierarchy.

It would thus be erroneous to link caste based exploitation in Bihar to some castes or caste groups. Caste based exploitation may be attributed to a kind of dominance syndrome which all castes irrespective of caste groups in Bihar (and in other states too) suffer from in varying degree. It's further substantiated by a field survey conducted in Bihar in 2010 to analyze the issues of caste conflict and social justice. (Research methodology can be referred in Appendix 1) The sample size comprised of 240 respondents from across the three caste categories namely the OBCs, SCs and Upper Castes having political affiliation to Indian National Congress (INC), Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and Janata Dal United (JDU). (Annexure 1a.)

The data indicated that as much as 72.1% respondents in all the three caste categories and political affiliation were unanimous in their view that in Bihar the dominant castes of all caste categories exploit the weaker castes. It was held by 65.9% SCs, 65.8% OBC and 84.8% UCs. This view was also strongly endorsed by respondents affiliated to various political parties ('Neutrals and Others' 78.4%, 81.4% to BJP, 66.7% to RJD and 64.6% to JDU). Therefore, it also appeared that among the political parties there is a very clear understanding about the fact that castes may be used as per their political relevance. (Annexure 2)

Discourse on *Dalit* Politics

The discourse on *Dalit* politics is now not only getting wide attention but also sensitizing people of *Dalit* issues and concerns. Caste conflict and identity are now being seen from their perspective as well. There're *Dalit* columnists and authors like Chandra Bhan Prasad who're giving caste discourse a completely new perspective. Prasad (2006) explored the reasons of discrimination of *Dalit* by caste Hindus and talked of history's longest fought war between *Dalit* and non-*Dalit* in the process of adjustment. He questioned is the *Varna* peoples' hate for the *Dalit* a manifestation of hatred of the victor for the defeated and the fear that the *Dasa* of the Vedic times may assert themselves and challenge the old Order? He called it '*Dalit* phobia' and argued that this gets passed on genetically through generations. Prasad reflects the typical *Dalit* perception of caste discrimination. It's difficult to trace the root of the discrimination and the so called 'victor's hatred' so distant in the history to prove the authenticity of Prasad's statement. In the course of history several factors have influenced the process of social stratification and several social groups have shifted position in the social strata. Nevertheless, Prasad presents a perspective of a plausible historical process. His concept also underlines the conflict on racial lines between the Aryan invaders and the native Dravida in which the earlier succeeded in establishing not only their racial supremacy but social hegemony as well.

Narayan (2003) presented yet another interesting discourse on the *Dalit* assertion of identity which may be considered an important reason for caste conflict in Bihar. Narayan observed that backward class movements in India reflected five distinct ideological features namely: withdrawal and self organization, claiming a higher *Varna* status, extolling the virtue of non-Aryan, relinquishing Hinduism completely and adopting Buddhism and lastly adhering to Marxist ideology replete with anti-caste Hindu theme. Narayan (2003) wrote:

"The community of *Dalit* lying dormant and silent has now become assertive, carving out their independent identity. Many folk-legend heroes are now at the centre of new *Dalit* discourse and they have been put into mythical frameworks. Contemporary Indian politics is making attempts either to appropriate and snatch these myths or twist them to serve its ends. Even the *Dalit* community is using these myths for its political mobilization". (Narayan, 2003: 4)

Narayan's views may be substantiated with example. In Bihar, Dusadh (a Scheduled Caste) have reinvented their mythical chivalrous hero 'Chuharmal' and his story of love with Rani

Reshma; the beautiful daughter of a local Bhumihaar Raja (ruler). He became a symbol of Dusadh pride and identity and the issue caused four spells of caste violences between the Dusadh and Bhumihaar during 1970-1990.

The Discourse on Reservation Politics

The discourse on reservation politics has highlighted some interesting aspects of caste configuration in Bihar. Caste based reservation which was meant to improve the status of the weaker sections among OBCs and SCs (Scheduled Castes) leadership reinforced the dominant castes syndrome. The Yadav and the Kurmi in Bihar have emerged as the dominant among Other Backward Classes while among *Dalit* Paswan and Chamar who are considered numerically and socio-economically dominant among the SCs enjoy the same status. The benefits of reservation in Bihar are yet to percolate to the lowest and weakest. Highlighting this aspect, Shourie (2006) referred to a Scheduled Caste member of the Mandal Commission LR Naik who observed:

“I hold very sincerely that caste/classes mentioned in the common list each having homogenous and cohesive characteristic, are not at the same degree or level of social and educational backwardness and I fear that the safeguards recommended for the advancement will not percolate to less unfortunate (sic) sections among them and the constitutional objectives proclaiming an establishment of an egalitarian society will remain a myth”.
(Shourie, 2006: 102)

Naik partitioned the Mandal Commission’s list in “Intermediate Backward Classes” and “Depressed Backward Classes.” He said:

“During the course of my extensive tours throughout the length and breadth of India, I have observed that a tendency is fast developing among the “Intermediate Backward Classes” to repeat the treatments or rather ill treatments they themselves have received from times immemorial at their hands of the Upper Castes, against their brethren”.
(Shourie, 2006: 102)

It seems extremely difficult to either reverse or reform the process of reservation at least for now as it has gained wide support across political parties. But there’re also some anxieties raised about the manner in which the issue of reservation has been politicised and the genuine concerns of merit have been ignored. Nehru, though himself an avid supporter

of the upliftment of the weaker sections cautioned the Chief Ministers against the ill-effects of reservation vide his letter dated 27 June 1961 in which he wrote: "This way lies not only folly, but disaster. Let's help the backward groups by all means, but never at the cost of efficiency. How are we going to build the public sector or indeed any sector with second-rate people?" [Shourie: 2006: IX]. Reservation has influenced the caste politics in Bihar and has given all the political parties a new kind of legitimacy to perpetuate caste conflict rather than using it as an effective tool to attain real social justice and harmony.

A considerable amount of discourse on caste politics in Bihar is related to electoral politics and the uncanny ability of the politicians to create new caste combinations for electoral gains. They have attempted to create several caste combinations in electoral politics. The Muslim-Yadav and Scheduled Castes combine gave Laloo Yadav's party RJD a formidable winning combination. But the caste combination Laloo Yadav made broke down when the *Dalit* (Scheduled Castes) felt alienated due to the Yadav dominance. Fodder scam was the political excuse for the *Dalit* to dissociate themselves, their alienation and lack of political opportunity as a caste group was the real cause behind. Witsoe, Frankel and Srinivas (2006) rightly observed this process:

"Non-Yadav OBC and Scheduled Caste alienation became more pronounced after the fodder scam emerged. Laloo was forced to fall back on his own caste for support, as well as some sections of the Upper Castes, in order for the state government to maintain a thin majority in the assembly". (Witsoe, Frankel and Srinivasan, 2006: 45)

Witsoe, Frankel and Srinivasan (2006) further stated:

"Laloo Yadav's political revolution remained incomplete. The same upper caste groups whom he had claimed to have displaced from power aligned with lower castes groups dissatisfied with RJD rule in order to topple his government. The NDA victory represents a new alliance of EBC castes with the BJP's increasingly assertive upper caste base, mediated by a small section of upper-backward castes". (Witsoe, Frankel and Srinivas, 2006: 50)

The observation of Witsoe, Frankel and Srinivasan (2006) besides other issues also highlights the fact that caste groups are not as rigid as they appear to be and they can be

divided into further sub-groups to make new caste combinations which can upset the existing ones. If Laloo Yadav succeeded in consolidating the OBCs under the Yadav leadership, his rival Nitish Kumar succeeded in consolidating the Kurmi and the Koeri castes from among the dominant OBCs to create a new caste axis supported by other castes who were feeling left out.

The BJP-JDU combine under the leadership of Nitish Kumar succeeded in creating a larger caste alliance. This new social engineering challenged the political hegemony of the Yadavs by bringing together rest of the dominant OBCs with Upper Castes and EBCs which are cumulatively larger in size yet individually smaller in number and thus socio-politically less dominant caste group within the OBCs fold. By carving out the EBCs (Extremely Backward Castes comprising of the numerically and socio-politically weak OBCs such as Nishad, Kanu, Halwai, Mali among others) from among the OBCs and extending 20% reservation to them in the Panchayat elections Nitish Kumar designed a new social-engineering against the formidable Yadav-led caste equation of Laloo Yadav. In the process, Nitish Kumar not only succeeded in marginalizing the supposedly invincible Laloo Yadav but also in diluting the Yadavs' political dominance in Bihar.

While one can't deny that there was an obvious political motivation behind this new social-engineering, but it was easier to justify and camouflage this political move as a step towards attaining the larger goal of social justice for the most deprived castes. The survey data indicated that the highest 47.5% respondents among the three caste categories believed that the rationale behind creating EBCs group was inspired by the idea of social justice. It was followed by 32.1% who considered the move as politically motivated. (Annexure 3) This politically motivated move itself is not without any purpose. People in Bihar consider it as a part of political process. It's evident from the survey data that the majority of 42.5% respondents across all caste categories considered the creation of caste equation as motivated by holding on to power. It is closely followed by 41.3% respondents who felt that the political motive behind creating caste equation is plainly to use castes as vote bank. (Annexure 4)

What is even most striking is to note how people in Bihar perceive the role of caste in the changing socio-political context. The survey data indicated that six out of ten or 62.5% respondents across all caste categories (SCs 46.3%, OBCs 60% and UCs 75.9%) were

unanimous in their opinion that in the present context caste played the role of a vote bank in Bihar. Even higher percent of respondents belonging to various political affiliations – (INC 74.1%, BJP 61%, JDU 58.5%) held similar opinion. A sizeable number of 66.2% ‘Neutral and Others’ respondents also held the same view. (Annexure 5)

No doubt, Laloo Yadav emerged the master craftsman of this social engineering, but he was shortly followed by Ramvilas Paswan and Nitish Kumar. Laloo Yadav’s RJD⁴ which created its vote bank with the help of OBCs, Muslim and SCs to marginalize the Upper Castes in the state was solidly supported by his own caste men Yadav who outnumbered not only the Upper Castes in the Bihar Assembly but also rest of the OBCs. This caused the alienation of the castes other than the Yadavs in Bihar from RJD. In response to that Ramvilas Paswan tried the Upper Castes, Muslim and SCs combination while Nitish Kumar with the help of BJP⁵ tried to consolidate the Upper Castes, the Extremely Backward Castes and Muslim vote bank. However, in the process of fragmenting the society, they all made the caste politics and conflict in Bihar even worse.

Indian politics suffers from the dilemma of whether to accept or reject caste as a social reality which helps in political maneuverings. Ensuring participation of all castes is essential for electoral politics. But this process becomes discriminatory due to the caste politics in Bihar. Perhaps the more political parties are trying to tackle the caste discrimination, the more complicated it’s becoming. Srinivas (1957) observed:

“The conscience of enlightened Indian demands that Untouchability be abolished and that everything that is possible be done to bring the Scheduled Castes and Tribes and the various other groups subsumed under the blanket term of Backward Classes, to the level of the so-called advanced groups. But it is beginning to be realized increasingly that the measures devised to bring about social and economic equality might themselves perpetuate the evil system of caste.” (Srinivas, 1957: 547)

Srinivas pointed out the schism between the social conscience and political process. Ever since independence the nation is committed to ensure socio-economic and political equality to all its citizens. The commitment is not to establish a non-hierarchical and non-stratified

⁴ Rashtriya Janta Dal, the political party led by Laloo Yadav formed in 1997 after he was forced to leave the party over corruption charges.

⁵ BJP is the acronym for Bhartiya Janta Party formed in the year 1980 and is the direct successor of Bhartiya Jana Sangh.

society as much as to remove the evils of the traditional caste-based hierarchy which put a considerable section of society to great disadvantage on account of birth. Any such discrimination defies the spirit of democracy. However, politics lacks the vision to implement it in such a manner that disadvantage is not shifted from one to another caste group. It's in fact the lack of political vision which has made caste conflict even more pronounced and has put the entire spectrum of caste to disadvantage.

Discourse on Caste in Historical Perspective

The political discourse in India can be broadly divided into two phases – the Nehruvian⁶ and the post-Nehruvian phase. While the Nehruvian era which influenced India's political philosophy extending up to 1970s primarily dealt with the issue of economic planning, black marketing, hoarding and food shortage, the Post-Nehruvian era beginning from 1980s saw the erosion of Nehru's secular-nationalism and subverted into parochial issue like caste politics which gradually started acquiring centerstage. [Nigam: 2004: 1] The rise in the discourse on caste politics also coincided with reorientation of Bihar's politics on the basis of caste and the instances of infight within the political parties, particularly in the Congress on caste lines.

The socialist movement of Lohia made caste a central figure in power politics and this ideology reflected more sharply among the non-Congress parties of socialist orientation. B P Mandal, the OBC leader of socialist background who wrote the script of caste-based reservation for the OBCs during the Janata Party regime in the later part of 1970s made caste politics a major political agenda. Though for over a decade the Congress Government kept it in the cold box, but during the short stint of V P Singh Government at the centre it was once again revived and finally implemented. The implementation of the Mandal Commission Report in 1990 was the major watershed in the Indian politics which changed the nature of political discourse and ever since then caste and communal issues prevailed in India's political discourse.

The major discourse on caste politics thus gives the impression as if it is synonymous to perpetual caste conflict and caste realignments for social and political gains. The reason is that the major content of the discourse on caste politics deals with the issues of conflict and oppression. However, it also gives the impression that caste politics to a considerable

⁶ The era of Jawahar Lal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister

extent has given voice to the marginalised sections of the society and has encouraged them to assert their rights and discover equal social status.

Both the scholarly and journalistic discourse on caste politics in the post-independence India have variously analysed the dynamics of this phenomenon. While discussing the journalistic discourse on caste politics Varadarajan (2006) opined that had there been a more pluralistic and diverse composition of the newsroom of national media, there would have been a more balanced view with regard to caste conflicts, particularly with regard to the stand taken by the national media on the issue of reservation. Varadarajan even questioned the role of the Upper Caste reporters and editors who he felt were reflecting their own personal impatience with the idea of affirmative action. He asked “Was the media coverage, then, a display of trade unionism by the privileged?” [Varadarajan: 2006: 2]

How far caste politics has succeeded in achieving social justice and social harmony remains a subject of deeper investigation. In recent years social justice has emerged as a rallying point for the backward and oppressed castes in Bihar. But it became victim of political manoeuvres and dishonesty and could not underscore the importance of social harmony to the extent desired. Political parties and ideologies rarely tried to highlight the cultural pluralism and professional skill caste as an institution gave to the Indian society. No society can afford perpetual conflict. Reconciliation must follow conflict and shortly too. To understand social justice in Bihar it will be thus necessary to first of all analyse the main issues of caste conflict which come in the way of extending social justice to the oppressed and deprived social classes of the state.

CASTE DEMOCRACY AND THE NUMBER GAME

Democracy depends on head count and nobody understands it better than the political class. Besides the political class, there is also a growing awareness even among the various castes and caste groups ever since independence about the role number can play in achieving political predominance and thereby improving the socio-economic status. But in India, the number or demography of castes is not evenly distributed. In several cases, the distribution is extremely skewed within the same caste group which has been further enumerated in this chapter. Caste demography can thus help us understand the issues and nature of caste conflict. Caste demography plays a major role in caste politics as it concerns caste population along with its socio-economic status which influences conflict.

The socio-economic and political dominance of caste or lack thereof has an association with caste politics. The disquieting relationship between those born with high status within the caste system and those which strive for higher status has been recognized by Srinivas as the factors of domination and conflict. Madan (2001) referred to this disquieting relationship between the dominant and weak castes in his essay on Srinivas:

“Srinivas conceptualized this in the notion of ‘dominant caste’ (Srinivas, 1959). The formulation, combining ritual status with numerical preponderance (within a village), economic strength and organizational ability, proved widely influential in social and political analyses for over two decades. While some scholars saw in the idea of dominance a restatement of the notion of Sanskritization, Srinivas himself pointed out that ‘the dominant caste could be a local source of Sanskritization [if it enjoyed high ritual status], or a barrier to its spread [if it did not enjoy such status]’ (Srinivas, 1966: 152).” (Madan, 2001: 117-118)

Caste Demography of Bihar

As per the Census of India 2011 Provisional Population Report, the population of Bihar is 103,804,637 comprising of 54,185,347 male and 49,619,290 female. On 1st March 2001 however it was 8, 28, 78, 796 persons comprising of 431, 96, 534 male and 39724832 female living in the geographical area of 94, 163 sq. Kms. approximately. The decadal growth between 2001 and 2011 in absolute numbers according to the 2011 Provisional Population Report is 20,806,128 while in terms of percentage it is nearly 25% which is approximately 3% less than the previous decadal growth. After the division of the state and the creation of Jharkhand out of it on November 15, 2000 Bihar slipped to the third position in terms of population following UP and Maharashtra. Administratively Bihar has now nine administrative divisions and thirty-eight districts. Bihar's population vis-à-vis the population of India, decadal growth rate of population and sex ratio in 2001 and 2011 is indicated in Table 1

Table 1. Population of Bihar in 2011

India/ Bihar	Population 2011			Percentage Decadal Growth Rate		Sex Ratio	
	Persons	Males	Females	1991-2001	2001-11	2001	2011
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
India	1,21,01,93,422	62,37,24,248	58,64,69,174	21.5	17.6	933	940
Bihar	10,38,04,637	5,41,85,347	4,96,19,290	28.6	25.1	916	881

Data Source: Census of India 2011, Provisional Population Totals

After the creation of Jharkhand majority of the Scheduled Tribe population of Bihar was integrated into the new state and the new demography came to be divided largely among Upper Castes, OBCs and SCs. Since no caste based census has been conducted in India since 1931 it's difficult to ascertain the exact figure of the caste composition. However, according to Census of India 2001 caste figure of SCs in Bihar (who're also referred to as *Dalit / Mahadalit*) was 13, 048, 608 which was close to 15.7% of the total population of the State in 2001.

In Bihar like in the other states OBCs constitute the largest castes group. Mandal Commission pegs the all India OBCs population at 52% which has been challenged and debated inside and outside the Parliament. The 14th Lok Sabha raised this issue when an empowered parliamentary committee questioned the rationale of allocating fund for the welfare of the OBCs without even having the correct figure of the OBCs in India. The Mandal Commission's figure of 52% OBC population is considered to be an extrapolation of the 1931 census data which according to its critiques has no scientific basis. On the other hand the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in 2004-05 estimated the OBC population to be 40.94%, SC – 15.9%, ST – 8.63 and Others – 30.80% (2004-05). The caste based census in India has been accepted in principle but the process is yet to be initiated. Till then all the data with regard to the population of various castes in India are subject to varied interpretations.

Till an official survey is conducted to ascertain the number and percentage of various caste groups in India the figures are nothing more than that of academic interest. But the demand to do the headcount keeps coming from the government and political leaders. Hanumantha Rao, a Congress MP and convener of the OBCs Parliamentary Forum, felt that the representation of the OBCs in the power structure is much less as compared to their number. The caste census is also backed by the leaders like Nitish Kumar, the chief minister of Bihar. In 2011 census Government has decided to carry out caste census which will fulfill the demands of several political leaders. Nevertheless, the idea of caste based census has its own serious limitations as well which has been expressed by social scientists from time to time.

Shah (2009) reported in The Indian Express that caste is a complicated question, and a census can never address its ambiguity. Pointing out the futility of the caste based head count on the ground of their vast geographical spread, varied interpretation of the very meaning of caste, hypergamy etc Shah (2009) observed:

“The demand for caste based census assumes that every caste is a discrete unit with clear boundaries determined by the rule of endogamy. It's true that caste boundaries are clear in a village, which is a small community, but the census has to count the number of every caste as they are spread in every village and town in a state and often more than one state. The

population of small castes may be counted easily, but most are not so small.” (Shah, 2009:11)

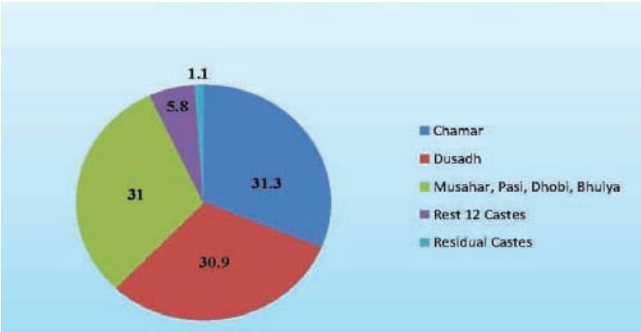
The debate for and against the caste based census had been a major issue of the national discourse on caste politics and the government of India eventually acceded to the demand of carrying out a caste based census in 2011. Notwithstanding the claims and counter claims about the number, it is certain that as an intermediary class the OBCs in Bihar as elsewhere in the country constitute a sizeable population. As per the list of National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) there're a large number of OBCs in Bihar under this category which far exceeds both the SC and the Forward Castes put together. The list of OBCs in Bihar is given in Appendix 2. As per the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes Orders (Amendment) Act 1976 of the Census of India, 2001, Annexure-Ia the list of notified Scheduled Castes in Bihar includes 23 castes. The list is given in Appendix 3.

As per the 2001 census data nearly 99.9% of the SCs population in Bihar is within the Hindu fold and only a negligible 0.04% comprising of 878 and 4842 are Sikhs and Buddhists respectively. The SCs or *Dalit* population in Bihar is predominantly rural and 93.3% of its total population resides in the countryside. The largest concentration of the SCs population is in the Gaya district which was 29.6% of the total population of the district. The smallest concentration (6.6%) of SCs population is in Kishanganj district. The all India figure of SCs population as per the 2001 census is estimated to be 1665.76 lakhs and Bihar with its 130.48 lakh SCs population ranks the third highest while in terms of percentage it has 7.8 % of India's total SCs population. According to the census data 2001 out of the 23 SCs, Chamar is the most populous Scheduled Caste in Bihar having a population of 4,090,070. They constitute 31.3 per cent of the total SCs population of the state. It's followed by Dusadh which is the second largest in terms of numbers, and its population of 4,029,411 amounts to 30.9 % of the total SC population.

In the descending order there are four other castes namely Musahar, Pasi, Dhobi and Bhuiya. Chamar and Dusadh along with the rest four constitute 93.2 % of the total SC population of the State. The Census 2001 report further mentions that the five Scheduled Castes have population ranging from 100,111 to 213,795, and thus, they constitute 5.8 %. The remaining 12 castes along with the generic castes constitute the

residual 1.1 % of the total SCs population as indicated in the Chart 1 which depicts the caste composition of SCs in Bihar.

Chart 1. Caste Composition of SCs in Bihar



Data Source: Census of India 2001

The Census Report 2001 states that eight SCs in Bihar have below 5000 population. On the human development index the low rate of literacy and education among the SCs is a major cause of their socio-economic backwardness and exploitation which turns out to be a major reason of caste conflict. As per the 2001 census whereas the national average of literacy among SCs is 54.7%, the literacy among the SCs of Bihar is slightly more than half thereof with 28.5%. Among the numerically larger castes Dhobis are far more literate than the rest. It's followed by Pasi, Dusadh and Chamar.

As a result of the low rate of literacy the status of education is also not good or close to the national figure. Among the literate, 39.7% are either without any educational level or have read below primary level. Those who have read up to primary and middle levels constitute 28.4% and 13.1% respectively. 15.1% literate SCs are educated up to matriculation/ secondary/higher secondary. Graduates and above comprise of only 3.6% while non-technical and technical diploma holders are merely 0.1%. Dhobi among the major Scheduled Castes have the highest proportion of matriculates 19.7% whereas Musahar and Bhuiya have the lowest number of matriculates (6% each approximately.).

Among the Chamar every 7th literate is a matriculate, while among the Dusadh and Pasi every 6th literate, is a matriculate. Table 2 provides data of the SCs literacy in Bihar.

Table 2. Literacy among SCs in Bihar

Name of SCs	Literate without Education Level	Below Primary	Primary	Middle	Matric/ Secondary/ HS/Inter etc.	Technical & Non-Technical Diploma etc	Graduate and Above
All Scheduled Castes	6.6	33.1	28.4	13.1	15.1	0.1	3.6
Bhuiya	15.3	44.1	26.5	7.4	6	NIL	0.6
Chamar	5.9	33.6	28.5	13.4	15	0.1	3.5
Dhobi	4.5	28.3	27	14.9	19.7	0.2	5.4
Dusadh	6	32	28.5	13.7	16.1	0.1	3.5
Musahar	15.3	44	27.8	6.7	5.5	NIL	0.8
Pasi	5.7	30	27.1	13.4	17.9	0.2	5.6

Data Source: Census of India 2001

The Nitish Kumar Government in Bihar has identified 18 of the 22 sub-castes among the SCs or *Dalit* as *Mahadalit*. The *Mahadalit* comprises of all the SCs excluding the Chamar, Paswan, Pasi and Dhobi as these four *Dalit* sub-castes comprise of the 69% *Dalit* population in the state and are also better off among the lot. According to the observation of the Government of Bihar the *Mahadalit* are not only the poorest among the *Dalit*, but in terms of population also they're marginal with just 31% population and thus lack proper representation as well. Bihar is the first state in the country to have constituted a commission to study the status of the *Mahadalit* and suggest remedial measures to uplift their status. The 18 *Mahadalit* are: Bantar, Bauri, Bhogta, Bhuiyan, Chaupal, Dabgar, Dom, Ghasi, Halalkhor, Hadi, Kanjar, Kuraria, Lalbegi, Mushar, Nat, Pan, Rajwar and Turi.

Caste Demography and Electoral Politics in Bihar

The OBCs also referred to as the 'middle castes' have the largest population and number of sub-castes stratified at different levels of occupation. The realignment of social forces during the 1970s in Bihar created the aspiration among the OBCs to acquire socio-political and economic prominence. By the 1990s OBCs emerged as an important social and political force to reckon with and the state saw emergence of Laloo Yadav who decidedly was the most dominant political leader among the OBCs so far. His emergence to the

centerstage of Bihar's political power structure demolishing the erstwhile dominance of the Upper Castes was also seen as the empowerment of the backward classes.

In Bihar social justice became the main political plank to mobilize the OBCs and SCs during the Mandal era against the Upper Castes hegemony and also helped improve the socio-political status of the traditionally marginalized OBCs and SCs beyond any doubt. However, it should not be construed that social justice actually benefitted the real downtrodden among the group of OBCs and SCs. As in the case of 'inter-caste group' conflict the issue of dominance also prevailed in the 'intra-caste group' conflict which helped the dominant among the OBCs and SCs avail greater benefit. In comparative terms of improvement of the socio-political and economic status the OBCs were at a more advantageous position as compared to the SCs. It's further substantiated by the field survey conducted in Bihar.

With regard to the question about the castes benefitting most from social justice, though the respondents in different caste categories held divergent views, nevertheless, the cumulative highest 32.9% respondents cutting across the three caste categories felt that the dominant OBCs (namely the Yadav, the Kurmi and the Koeri) have benefitted most from social justice in Bihar. Separately 31.7% SCs and as expected 44.3% Upper Castes also endorsed the view. Besides that 54.1% OBCs (28.3% OBCs + 25.8% dominant OBCs) also agree that in comparison to total SCs 36.6% (19.5% SCs and 17.5% dominant SCs) dominant OBCs have benefitted most from social justice. (Annexure 6). Laloo Yadav succeeded in mobilizing the OBCs, the oppressed and the minorities in the name of social justice and became the rallying point in Bihar's politics.

There are some interesting figures with regard to the increase in the participation of the electoral process in Bihar since independence both in terms of the number of contestants and the turnout percentage which indicate the participation of the various castes groups in the process. This also emphasizes the level of political consciousness among the people of Bihar which has also resulted in the socio-political and economic empowerment of the marginalized sections of the society. The first general election in 1952 had 1602 contestants for the Bihar Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) and 198 contestants for the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Parliament). As against that the number of contestants for the Bihar Vidhan Sabha elections rose to the highest number 8410 in 1995 and

subsequently to 3934 in 2000 as seen in Table 5.3. Similarly, the number of contestants for the Lok Sabha grew to an all time high 1448 in 1996 and 497 in the 1999 Parliamentary elections as seen in Table 4.

Table 3. Rising Participation in Bihar Vidhan Sabha Elections

Year	Total Number of Candidates	Average Number of Candidates per Constituency	Candidates Forfeited Deposit (%)
1952	1602	5.0	53.3
1957	1394	4.3	46.9
1962	1529	4.8	53.0
1967	2025	6.3	64.5
1969	2154	6.7	63.4
1972	1982	6.2	62.9
1977	2973	9.1	73.7
1980	2959	9.1	74.6
1985	4238	13.0	83.2
1990	6439	19.8	91.5
1995	8410	26.0	91.8
2000	3934	12.1	NIL

Data source: Kumar, Sanjay. “New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar (1990-2000)” *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, Editor: Ghanshyam Shah, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2002

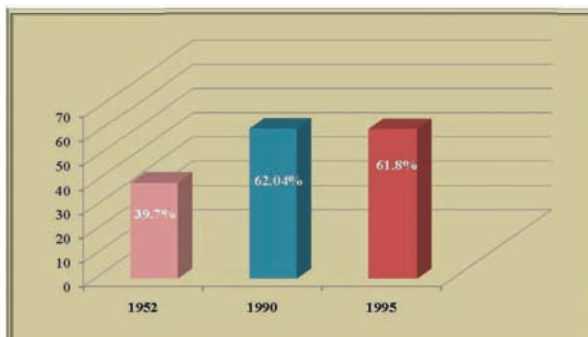
Table 4. Rising Participation in Lok Sabha Elections, Bihar

Year	Total Number of Candidates	Average Number of Candidates per Constituency	Candidates Forfeited Deposit (%)
1952	198	3.6	33.8
1957	189	3.5	40.2
1962	233	4.3	46.3
1967	315	5.9	61.2
1971	421	7.9	71.0
1977	340	6.2	70.2
1980	594	11.0	76.9
1984	676	12.5	82.9
1989	711	13.1	81.0
1991	1246	23.0	90.3
1996	1448	26.8	91.5
1998	451	8.5	72.2
1999	497	9.2	76.6

Data source: Kumar, Sanjay. “New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar (1990-2000)” *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, Editor: Ghanshyam Shah, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2002

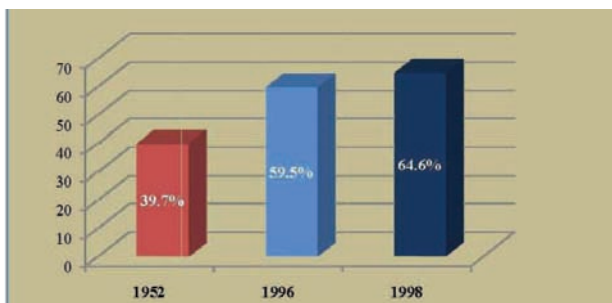
The voter turnout in the Bihar Vidhan Sabha elections increased from 39.7% in 1952 to 62.04% in 1990 and marginally declined to 61.8% in 1995 as seen in Chart 5.2. In the Lok Sabha elections the voters' turnout in 1952 was 39.7% whereas in 1996 it was 59.5% and rose to 64.6% in 1998 as seen in Chart 3.

Chart 2. Rise in Voter Turnout Bihar Vidhan Sabha Elections



Data Sources: Based on Kumar, Sanjay “New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar: Janata Dal on the Decline”, Economic and Political Weekly, 34: 34/35 (Aug. 21 - Sep. 3, 1999), pp. 2472- 2480 and Election Commission of India Data.

Chart 3. Rise in Voter Turnout Lok Sabha Elections, Bihar



Data Sources: Based on Kumar, Sanjay “New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar: Janata Dal on the Decline”, Economic and Political Weekly, 34: 34/35 (Aug. 21 - Sep. 3, 1999), pp. 2472- 2480 and Election Commission of India Data.

Charts 2 and 3 thus also indicate the larger participation of different caste groups in the political process. Not only that, the election analysis done by political scientists also

underscore the fact that over the years the backward and the oppressed castes' participation in the political process through elections is gradually rising and surpassing the number of the Forward Castes' participation. It's an indication of the rising political consciousness among the OBCs and SCs. The Tables 5 and 6 point out the changing caste composition of Bihar Vidhan Sabha and the changing caste profile of the Lok Sabha representatives from Bihar:

Table 5. Changing Social Composition of Bihar Vidhan Sabha 1967-2000 (in %)

Category	1967	1969	1985	1990	1995	2000
Upper Castes	41.8	38.3	26.4	32.5	17.1	29.9
OBC	24.2	26.7	24.6	29.7	45.0	36.4
Muslim	5.6	5.9	10.1	6.1	7.1	9.3
Women	3.4	1.2	4.0	4.0	2.8	7.4

Data Source: Based on Kumar, Sanjay "New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar", Ed.: Shah, Ghanshyam, Caste and Democratic Politics in India, London, Anthem Press, 2004, pp. 266

Table 6. Changing Social Profile of Lok Sabha Representatives (Bihar) (1989-99 in %)

Category	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999
Upper Castes	33.3	18.9	27.7	29.6	42.5
OBC	30.6	43.1	38.7	31.4	24.0
Muslim	5.5	4.1	7.4	11.1	5.5
Women	3.7	5.5	5.5	7.4	9.2

Data Source: Based on Kumar, Sanjay "New Phase in Backward Caste Politics in Bihar", Editor: Shah, Ghanshyam, Caste and Democratic Politics in India, Delhi, Permanent Black, 2005, pp. 353

In 1999 Lok Sabha elections were marked with the consolidation of the anti Laloo Yadav forces which saw merger of Janta Dal with Samta Party and its electoral alliance with BJP (Bhartiya Janta Party). As a result, after a decade of declining trend the Upper Castes representation saw a phenomenal rise leaving behind the OBCs by 18.5%. Caste

demography and the changing electoral alliances of castes thus clearly influence the electoral results in Bihar.

The Fall of Upper Castes and the Rise of OBCs

The shift in the political power equation in Bihar had been gradual in the early years of the post-independence era and rather fast in the post-Mandal era. Ostensibly the Mandal Commission recommended methods of social upliftment of the marginalized backward castes through reservation in government services and higher education, but ironically it became the rallying point for the OBCs for attaining political empowerment too. In the days to come, it helped the polarization of the OBCs on the one hand and the Upper Castes on the other and became a major source of caste conflict in Bihar and many other parts of India.

There is no doubt that Mandal Commission helped in the consolidation of the OBCs as a formidable caste group in Bihar from political angle. Their cumulative numerical strength and the social dominance of the kulaks among them mainly the Yadavas, the Kurmis and the Koeris are too significant for the electoral politics to be ignored by the political parties.

While the Mandal Commission identified 168 castes as Backward Castes, the Government of Bihar recognized only 128 out of them. The Upper Castes in Bihar comprises of the Brahmin, Rajput, Kayastha and Bhumihar. They were active on the socio-political and economic spheres in varying degrees and dominated the politics too for a long time. Due to the growing caste consciousness and political mobilization of castes the presence and dominance of the Upper Castes vis-à-vis the OBCs and SCs on the political arena is on a decline.

The caste-wise breakup of Bihar Legislative Assembly during the decade of 1985-1995 as mentioned in Table 7 and the growth/decline of the three caste categories during the same decade indicated in Table 8 substantiates the fact.

Table 7. Caste-wise Breakup of Bihar Legislative Assembly (1985-1995)

Year	Brahmin	Bhumihar	Kayastha	Rajput	Kurmi	Yadav	Koeri	OBC	Muslim	SC	ST
Total											
1985	30	38	4	46	18	47	12	18	33	48	30
324											
1990	27	34	3	41	18	63	12	28	20	48	29
323*											
1995	11	17	5	22	15	84	28	39	23	48	28
320**											

* One seat vacant

** 4 seats were countermanded in the 1995 election

Data Source: Based on Bhelari, Kanhaiah “Ruling the Roost: Backward Castes Dominate Bihar Politics” *The Week*, Vol. 13, No. 8, April 30, 1995, p. 42

Table 8. Growth/Decline of the Three Caste Categories in Bihar Assembly (1985-1995)

Caste Category	Year			Percentage Share of the Population
	1985	1990	1995	
1. Forward Castes	118	105	55	12.7
2. Middle Castes (Upper Backward Castes)	77	93	127	18.2
3. Other Backward Castes	18	28	39	31.2

Data Source: Based on Nedumpara, Jose. J. *Political Economy and Class Contradiction: a Study*. New Delhi: Amol Publications, 2004: 64

To understand the macrocosm of caste politics in Bihar, it's equally important to look at the microcosm of caste composition in the state and analyze it in terms of the socio-political mobility, hierarchy and political aspirations and behavior of various castes. The Forward

Castes⁷ domination in politics continued till the 1980s. It started sliding down from the 1990s both numerically and in terms of influence and was replaced by the resurgent OBCs and SCs more particularly the middle OBCs namely the Yadav, the Kurmi and the Koeri. Of the total 22 Chief Ministers since 1947, there have been 12 Forward Castes, 7 OBC, 2 SC and 1 minority community CM so far.

If we look at the caste composition of the Chief Ministers so far the maximum number of CMs among the Forward Castes were *Brahmin* whose number (till 2010) had been 5. It's followed by Rajput whose number is 4. There have been 2 Kayastha and 1 Bhumihar CM. The list of OBC CMs is dominated by the Yadav and Bihar has had 4 Yadav CMs till 2009. Among other noticeable OBCs CMs there has been 1 Nai and 1 Kurmi each. Among SCs there has been 1 Paswan (Dusadh) and 1 Chamar CM so far. The last Forward Castes CM Dr Jagannath Mishra, a *Brahmin* occupied the seat in 1990. He was followed by Laloo Yadav who succeeded by his wife Rabri Devi remained in the office of the Chief Minister practically for the next 15 years only to be replaced by another OBC CM Nitish Kumar who came to power in 2005 with overwhelming majority after a rather disappointing 7 day stint as CM from 3-3-2000 to 19-3-2000.

The Extremely Backward Class (EBCs) still remains somewhat marginalized. In order to improve the status of the EBCs Nitish Kumar Government in Bihar decided to grant 20% reservation to them in all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions in the State. The caste conflict in Bihar which emerges out of the inequitable distribution of power, wealth and opportunity has a significant relation with caste demography.

No caste group in power has been able to deliver justice to all others particularly the socially and economically oppressed among all caste groups. This raises reasonable reservation about the ability and intention of the political leadership to deliver social justice in the state. Not only that, the ongoing caste conflict has also reflected on the political stability of the state leadership. From 1947 till 2010, in a span of 63 years there have been 22 CMs in the State whereas the number should have been close to 12-13 had they all served for the full term.

⁷ Forward castes and Upper Castes are synonymous terms used interchangeably in the same context

Intermittently, the state has also gone through the spell of President's Rule under Article 356 of the Constitution for 7 times cumulatively for a period close to three and a half years since 1947 due to various political upheavals. Srivastava (2009) raised a relevant question whether it's the heterogeneity of castes which influences the politics and is responsible for the conflict or is it the political perspective responsible for analyzing caste in terms of number, political need and conflict and ignores the societal perspective of poverty development and equilibrium? It's in this context that Srivastava (2009) observed:

“Even today, the caste movements have continued in Bihar-though under the garb of seeking equitable distribution of deliverables- which bring in societal disequilibrium and creates a strained social milieu. This is surely not the best pill for Bihar that is starved of development. But can the caste system ever be shaken off Bihar? Social scientists argue that it cannot be wished away unless the caste pattern of poverty is eliminated in Bihar.” (Srivastava, 2009)

The heterogeneity of caste and the traditional oppression of the multitude by the handful had been one of the major reasons behind the series of caste conflicts in Bihar at the social-economic and political levels. The demography divided into such a heterogeneous scale also divides the society into sectarian interest groups on caste lines which constantly keep conflicting with each other. The division of castes into caste groups is rather virtual in nature as within each caste group there're number of castes – some weak some dominant. There's not only 'inter-caste conflict', there're also 'intra-caste conflicts' in which castes falling within the same group clash with each other. Eventually, it turns out to be a conflict between the dominant and the weak castes or socio-politically organized and unorganized castes.

Demography does determine the dominance of various castes and caste groups. Nevertheless, it subsumes within itself besides headcount of the castes other factors too like the socio-economic status, power and dominance among others. For example, among the higher OBCs Yadav's dominance is mainly on account of their number while the Kurmi's dominance both on account of education and economic status as compared to them. Demography and caste politics thus supplement each other by making use of each other's respective strengths. However, after the socio-political mainstreaming of the OBCs and SCs, it would be unfair to believe that the socio-

economically weaker among the Upper Castes are now also facing near similar problem of discrimination and oppression at times.

CASTE CONFLICT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The heterogeneity found in Bihar's caste demography and ensuing socio-political consciousness is a major source of caste conflict in the State. In the socio-political context, conflict arising out of oppression, injustice, discrimination among the social groups often leads to the demand for social justice. Similarly, the lack of social justice leads to the situation in which conflict becomes inevitable. The social processes of conflict and justice must be analyzed concurrently in order to understand the various dimensions of caste conflict.

In Bihar caste conflict has been caused by the social, economic and political factors of various natures which have often culminated into caste violence. The factors of conflict range from socio-economic disparity to power and politically motivated misuse of caste feelings and domination over scarce resources in the state. It was found in the survey referred earlier that the SCs considered socio-economic disparity to be the main cause of caste conflict in Bihar, and almost half or 48.8% respondents thought so. Among the SCs respondents affiliated to political parties INC (44.4%) and JDU (43.1%) held the same opinion. As against that 40.8% OBCs and 46.8% Upper Castes were of the opinion that the main cause of caste conflict in Bihar was due to the conflict of power and political interest, an opinion that was again repeated by respondents affiliated to BJP and RJD (45.8% and 46.7%) respectively. (Annexure 7)

The survey data also indicated that as much as 35% respondents across all caste categories considered misuse of caste feelings as one of the reasons of caste conflict in Bihar. (Annexure 8) Misuse of caste feelings is apparently politically motivated. It's thus obvious that different caste groups in Bihar hold different views about the causes of caste conflict which in most cases is influenced by their own socio-economic status. However, conflict is an inevitable social process which varies in nature from society to society and manifests in racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic and various other forms. Therefore, there is also a need to appreciate the social process of conflict in a larger perspective.

Conflict as a Social Process

In the sociological context conflict may be explained as a struggle between individuals or collectivities in which the aim of the conflicting groups are not only to get hold of the desired values but at the same time to be forceful enough to neutralize, injure or even eliminate the rivals. It's an assertion over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are to assert their values or claims over those of others. There has been a lack of unanimity among the Social Philosophers about the role and assessment of conflict in society.

In the flexible social structure conflicts also become the agent of socio-economic change which helps alter rigidity in social life and economic status. However, it's also important to note that due to the socio-economic-political and cultural background every society is differently enabled and prepared to accommodate conflict. A prolonged conflict without resolution may be as counterproductive as the lack of it. Conflict, according to the interactionist view of Psychology, can be both functional and dysfunctional. When conflict supports the goals of the group and seeks to improve its performance it's considered functional. On the contrary, when conflict hinders the performance of the group, it becomes dysfunctional. This may apply to the sociological interpretation of conflict as well.

Conflict is as integral to human society as cooperation is. Therefore, it's neither possible nor desirable to wish away conflict from the human society. To help social harmony prevail, the antagonistic encounters may be controlled and the energy may be channelized to reduce social plight and individual sufferings.

The divergent views about conflict may be safely divided into two groups; one which belongs to the Sociologists like Durkheim, Parsons among others who look at conflict as an abnormal or pathological phenomena, a kind of ailment in the social body. Durkheim's functionalist view according to Shortell (2006) emphasizes the role of social objects or actors, that is, on what they do and holds that Durkheim believed that harmony, rather than conflict, defined society. He examines social phenomena with regard to their function in producing or facilitating social cohesion.

The other views on the contrary maintain that conflict is not all that bad and helps in development, change and overall stability of the society. This finds expression in the Hegelian and Marxist thoughts and can also be experienced in the Social Darwinism associated with Spencer. The term 'survival of the fittest' though now associated with Darwin who first used it in his 'Origin of Species' but the concept and the expression in the social context belonged to Spencer (1867) who argued that in the 'natural conflict' between the social groups, only the best adapted will survive and ensure the survival capacity of the rest of the society.

The earlier approach may be considered as the conservative approach while the latter appears radical. The fundamental difference between the conservative and the radical thought is that of negativity and positivity. The conservative approach looks at the negative functions and aspects of conflict while the radical in a way celebrates it in the hope of society eventually becoming more harmonious and homogenous after going through the process of conflict.

Le Materialisme dialectique or The Dialectical Materialism of Hegel (1939) supported the concept of conflict by pointing out the existence of opposite forces which are always present and constitute the moving force of history. The *dialectical* process or the conflict between the opposite forces according to Hegel is always present in the society. Under this process, some dominant idea becomes a *thesis*. In the course of time it has to confront the conflict with another set of opposite ideas which may be referred to as *anti-thesis*. This conflict situation finally ends in a *synthesis* which draws upon the value elements of both the *thesis* and the *anti-thesis*.

Marx, who though drew upon the Hegelian *Dialectical Materialism*, took the discussion of conflict to a different sphere of social thought where he presented class struggle and class conflict as the agents of social change. The *Communist Manifesto* (1848) of Marx and Engels wrote that "All history is the history of conflict." They look at history as the saga of perpetual conflict between the exploiting and the exploited class and it repeats itself over and over again until capitalism is overthrown by the workers and a socialist state is established. In the Marxian scheme of things class which is the perpetrator of conflict, is essentially an economic entity phenomenon between the conflicting group of 'Haves' and 'Have-Nots'.

Social Justice in the Philosophical Context

Social Justice as a concept that has fascinated political philosophers ever since Plato (429-347 BC) argued that an ideal state would rely on four virtues namely *wisdom*, *courage*, *moderation*, and *justice*. Plato in the book *Republic* said that “justice is another man’s good, being for the interest of the stronger; injustice, a man’s own interest and advantage, but against the interest of the weaker” (1997: 48). Justice is an overriding concept to ensure a harmonious and equitable system for the well-being of humankind. The task remains challenging on account of the fact that inequality and diversity are inherent in the human society and seems to be divinely ordained. No two persons are equal in terms of their features, capabilities, interests and dispositions. This reflects on the constitution of the society as well.

Thus to ensure justice in an unequal and hierarchical human society is an extremely challenging endeavour which the mankind has been attempting since antiquity. The term justice also refers to justice of all kind- social, economic and political which is essential to maintain social harmony. Justice is also considered a gross indicator of the fairness of a society in terms of its method of distributions of rewards and burdens. In the context of caste politics political parties endorse the method of rewards and burden as part of their redistributive agenda. Justice draws its strength and authority from the codes of morality which exist in different forms in different cultures. Since the quest for a just order is perennial, humankind has variously attempted to find answer in the moral, ethical, theological and political perspectives.

***Nyaya*: The Indian Worldview of Justice**

In India, the matters of justice or *nyaya* have been discussed in various discourses of the ancient scriptures such as the *Vedas*, the *Puranas*, the *Smritis* and the *Dharmashashtra* popularly known as *Manusmriti* compiled by Manu in circa 2nd – 1st century AD. *Dharma* was the basis of the ancient Indian jurisprudence. King, who was supposed to do justice, derived his power from *dharma*. *Manusmriti*, though a rather controversial ancient scripture in the modern political context, deals with the duties of the king, various castes, rules of occupation in relation to caste, occupations during distress, penances of sins, and the rules leading to specific forms of rebirth.

According to Doniger (1991), *The Laws of Manu* deal with jurisprudence, philosophy and religion and thereby *Manusmriti* created a unique, didactic model defining how an ordinary man, woman as well as priest and king should live their life in public and in private spheres. The process of justice in *Manusmriti* also deals with crime, justice, and punishment.

In ancient India, the system of criminal justice was founded on the *Varna* system and it was *Manusmriti* which for the first time codified crime and punishment for each *Varna* according to their status in the hierarchy. Jaishankar and Halder (2004) wrote that from the *Vedic* period onward, the perennial attitude of the Indian civilization has been one of justice and righteousness. Justice, in the Indian civilization, according to the authors is a human expression of a wider universal principle of nature and if humans entirely true to nature, their actions would be spontaneously just. Jaishankar and Halder (2004) emphasised that humans in three major guises experience justice. These include experience in the sense of a distributive equity, as moral justice, social justice, and legal justice. Each of these forms of justice is looked at as a particularization of the broad principle of the universe seen as a total organism.

From the broadest to narrowest conception, the ancient Indian views on justice are inseparably tied with a sense of economy (Wayman 1970: 284). Human institutions of justice - the state and law therefore participate in this overall economy. Nevertheless, there has been a strong belief in India through the centuries that nature itself is the ultimate and final arbiter of justice. Eventually, justice is essentially cosmic justice. (Underwood 1978: 271-285)

The application of justice can never be devoid of the logical analysis. The causal relationship of human actions can also be seen as the process of retribution and sin. The concept is further explained under the *Karmic* philosophy which also found articulation in the Buddhist philosophy. In Buddhism, there is nothing called unexplained, causeless suffering. It's believed that every state of human existence whether good or bad has a causal relationship with one's good or evil deeds. The *karmic* justice eventually rewards the just and righteous behaviour by ensuring escape from suffering and leading to the permanent state of *Nirvana*.

However, fully to appreciate the concept of justice one also needs to look at the Hindu concept of *dharma*. Irani (1995) wrote that according to the *Upanishadic* thought no action of an individual can be analyzed and judged in terms of the interest of that individual alone. The idea inevitably points out the aspect of one's moral and social responsibility towards others. Irani (1995) observed:

“Every action reflects of the reality greater than the individuality of the agent, and also affects others thereby generating responsibility upon the agent. This thesis presupposes the ultimate interconnectedness of the human beings finally rooted in the view that each individual is a manifestation of the Universal Self and the Universal Self is identical with the Essence of Reality. We are thus embedded in a vast web of mutual responsibility in which empathy and compassion call for the minimization of human suffering, but especially to see that we do not add to human suffering by living in accordance with the detailed injunctions of *dharma*.” (Irani, 1995: 5-6)

The concept of *nyaya* or justice in the ancient Indian discourse thus appears to be multidimensional which has been explained in the theological, philosophical and mundane terms of crime and punishment. While the philosophical discourse set the tone for the rationale and purpose of *nyaya*, the theological discussion empowered the executor with the divine authority to implement justice on behalf of the creator.

The jurisprudence of Manu helped implement *nyaya* in accordance with the prevailing social customs and hierarchy of his historic period which is now socially and politically contested by a section of the Hindu society. It may not be found conducive to the concept of social justice as per the present socio-political aspirations and many of its provisions particularly those pertaining to the treatment of the *Sudra* definitely appear to be discriminatory.

Nevertheless, it also needs to be appreciated that *Manusmriti* was the first attempt to give the Hindu society a proper code of conduct and justice which like any other social treatise had several timeless and temporal provisions. The fact that over a period of time its unjust and oppressive provisions have become redundant bears its testimony. But at the same time, the same treatise had made equally stringent provisions for the deviant

behavior of the people of the higher *Varna* as well. Therefore, to consider this maiden attempt to create a code of conduct to ensure the rule of order and justice as entirely a social sabotage aimed solely at demeaning a section of society would be a somewhat unfair conclusion. It's the archaic discriminatory and oppressive provisions of *Manusmriti* which deserve condemnation rather than the spirit of the endeavour to create order and justice howsoever primordial which this treaties sought to achieve in the decaying era of civilizational development in India.

The Christian Worldview of Justice

The concept of justice also finds great deal of discussion in Christianity and in the western philosophy. Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) says that Justice is a certain rectitude of mind whereby a man does what he ought to do in the circumstances confronting him. He thus seems to believe that justice is a form of natural duty which each individual owes to another individual and something that cannot be enforced by any manmade law. One finds here the Christian worldview emphasizing that everybody is equal before God and thus deserves equal treatment, love and compassion.

The analogy thus requires conformity to the natural principles of morality so as to fulfill one's duty towards God and thereby ensure social justice through religion and morality. However, in reality a human being defines morality in his own narrow perspective of self-interest which is often at cross purpose with the tenets of morality. Humans also perceive the grey areas between ethical and unethical, moral and immoral. Therefore, the full implementation of social justice doesn't only depend on one's adherence to the self-inspired motivation and becomes subject to a more formalized system.

An early theological utilitarian John Locke (1632-1704), pointed out at the inborn natural goodness and beauty of human beings, and so, if they in the long run rationally pursue their personal happiness and pleasure, the overall social well-being will be looked after fairly well. John Locke characterized Christianity as being utilitarian as believers see utility in rewards of their good and just conduct in their afterlife. Later on Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) spearheaded the utilitarian concept which evaluated the moral elements of an act entirely on the basis of its outcome.

The era they belonged to was marked with enlightenment and naturalism and thus any idea of divine inspiration was rejected. They believed that it's through the twin endowment of reason and rationality that human nature and society can achieve perfection. Thus, justice is achieved when maximum number of people feels happy together. To Bentham the act of punishment externally imposed by the society as a social sanction was necessary to make the consequences of improper action apparently painful. According to him, social justice was attained by means of deterrence based on the rational calculation of "equal punishment for equal crime".

Social Justice in the Christian Context

The phrase 'social justice' is attributed to the Italian Catholic scholar Jesuit Luigi Taparelli (1793-1862) who coined it towards the mid 19th century (during the 1840s) which was based on the teachings of the 13th century Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas. Taparelli extensively wrote in his journal named *Civiltà Cattolica* and held the view that the subjective philosophy of René Descartes was responsible for the dramatic errors in morality and politics and also that unclear metaphysical ideas about humanity and society can lead to social chaos. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII, who was a student of Taparelli, published the encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of the Working Classes), stressed that the basis of society should be cooperation rather than class conflict and competition which reflects the spirit of social harmony and justice.

Later on in the next century the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (On the Restoration of Social Order) published in 1931 by Pope Pius XI, underscored that social justice is a personal virtue and that society can be just only if the individuals are. As per the theological and philosophical explanation, social justice remains a moral order concerned with equal justice in all aspects for making a harmonious society which in practice becomes a binding for the state to enforce even by law. But can there be a consensus on the definition of social justice or can it be fully implemented or arrived at? Is it possible to ensure that people avail equal rights and opportunities and everybody, from the bottom of the social pyramid to the top of it deserves and gets an even playing field? Several epistemological explanations of social justice can be found which are now also seen in the context of human rights, but despite that social injustice and inequality are far from over.

Social Justice in the Indian Constitution

The articulation of social justice in the Indian Constitution and its reiteration in the political discourse time and again also point out the fact that like other societies social injustice had been a deep rooted problem in the Indian society. The notion of social justice is subject to varied perceptions and interpretations. Both the beneficiaries and the disadvantaged caste groups have different expectations from social justice. In the field survey referred earlier, respondents who were asked to express their views on social justice indicated that the opinion is divided between Upper Castes on the one hand and OBCs and SCs on the other. The majority 45.6% Upper Castes felt that social justice can't be achieved without social harmony which may be construed as only social harmony will lead to social justice. On the other hand, 51.2% SCs and 45.8% OBCs together considered social justice to be the basis of overall social development and thus gave it top most importance as compared to social harmony.

The data also indicated a clear division of opinion on the basis of political affiliation. While the respondents affiliated to INC and BJP (48.1 and 45.8% respectively) held that without social harmony, social justice can't be achieved, those affiliated to RJD and JDU (53.3 and 50.8% respectively) opined that social justice is the basis of overall social development which in a way means that social harmony will follow social justice and not vice versa. (Annexure 9)

The caste based discrimination is considered as one of the major sources of social injustice. In independent India attempts have been made for correction through constitutional and political process. India, after its independence, adopted social justice as one of the most important functions of the state and to ensure that included it in the preamble of its Constitution. The Preamble, which is considered to be the spirit of the Constitution of India, accords Justice – social, economic and political topmost priority thus makes attainment of social justice one of the main objectives. The Preamble of the Constitution also aspires to make India a '*Socialist Secular Democratic Republic*'⁸.

The Supreme Court of India has explained the expression of social justice as the recognition of greater good to larger number without deprivation or accrual of anybody's legal rights. It further elaborates that between two parties if a deal is made

⁸ Added into the Preamble vide the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution in 1976 (w.e.f. 3-1-1977)

with one party without serious detriment to other, the court in such a situation would lean to the weaker section of the society. As a flexible continuous process, the constitutional concern of social justice means to extend justice to all the sections of the society by providing facilities and opportunities to remove handicaps and disabilities with which the poor etc. are languishing and secure dignity of their person.⁹

The Supreme Court holds that social justice is the comprehensive form to remove social imbalance by law and harmonizing the rival claims or the interests of different sections of the society and/or sections in the social structure or individuals which would thus help in building up a welfare state¹⁰ [Basu 2001: 3]. Article 46 of the Constitution which provides that the "State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interest of the weaker sections of the people, and, in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation", also brings out the meaning and expression of social justice by contrasting it with social injustice. The expression social justice underscores the concept of 'distributive justice' which should be interpreted as the elimination of economic disparity and rectifying injustice emanating from the transactions between the unequals in the society.

Article 16 of the Constitution which deals with the Fundamental Right of Equality of Opportunity in matters of public employment to all citizens, also at the same time provides that nothing in the same article shall prevent the State from making any provision for reservation in matters of promotion to any class or classes of posts in the services under the State in favour of SC and ST which the State may consider as not being adequately represented in its services. The provision is made in order to ensure that the spirit of social justice is carried out in words and deeds.

The provisions of the Constitution as enumerated under Part XVI provide that in addition to stressing the right of individuals as citizens, the state shall also endeavor to promote social justice by elaborating a series of affirmative-action measures for the disadvantaged groups. These "Special Provisions Relating to Certain Classes" in practice include the reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and in

⁹ Consumer Education & Research Centre v. Union of India (1995) 3 SCC 42, (para 19): AIR 1995 SC 922

¹⁰ Dalmia Cement (Bharat) Ltd. vs. Union of India (1996) 10 SCC 104 (para 13).

the state legislative bodies for members belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The number of seats set aside for them is proportional to their share of the national and respective state populations. Part XVI also reserves some government appointments for these disadvantaged groups insofar as they do not interfere with administrative efficiency. However, in the following years the entire political discourse regarding the principle of affirmative action centered around the policy of caste based reservation which now included the OBCs too besides the SCs and STs.

Implementing social justice through reservation for the marginalized sections of the society on the basis of their ascribed social status in the traditional caste hierarchy is still a matter of hot socio-political debate. Caste backwardness, educational backwardness and economic backwardness are the three most contested arguments made for and against the basis of reservation. The survey conducted in Bihar indicated that the highest 42.9% respondents across the three caste categories were unanimous in their views that economic backwardness should be the basis for implementing social justice.

Castewise analysis indicated that 36.6% SCs, 48.3% OBCs considered economic backwardness as the basis for implementing social justice, whereas among the Upper Castes 48.1% favoured the idea of educational backwardness. Separately, there seems to be no unanimity among the caste groups with regard to their views on the issue but cumulatively it's the economic criterion which was considered to be the most befitting unanimously. Further, respondents affiliated to different political parties- (INC 59.3%, BJP 44.1%, RJD 33.3% and JDU 43.1%) tended to congregate that educational backwardness should be the criteria for implementing social justice. In either case caste backwardness was not considered the most preferred basis for implementing social justice. (Annexure 10)

It was also interesting to see that in response to the question of the possibility of modification in the policy of reservation while 59.5% Upper Castes and 55.0% OBCs respondents felt that the policy is not sacrosanct and thus can be modified and therefore instead of social backwardness economic backwardness may be considered as the basis of reservation, 51.2% SCs respondents also felt that the policy is rather sacrosanct and thus no change is required. In a way it also indicates the changing social reality that as

compared to the SCs the socio-economic status of the OBCs and particularly that of the dominant OBCs has improved and therefore their views with regard to reservation has some resemblance of the views held by the Upper Castes.

The idea of the removal of the creamy layer from availing the benefits of reservation was not keenly supported by any of the caste groups. As expected, the highest 29.1% was supported by the Upper Castes while among the OBCs 20.0% and SCs a meager 7.3% stood in favour of the idea. It was thus apparent that the idea of removal of the creamy layer was subsumed in the idea of economic basis for extending reservation and thus would make the demand for the removal of the creamy layer rather irrelevant. (Annexure 11) The survey data further indicated that respondents among all caste categories dominantly held the view that affirmative action implemented as the policy of reservation had helped bring the OBCs and *Dalit* into the mainstream of society. Therefore, reservation had served its social purpose of uplifting the status of the weaker and oppressed sections of the society and played an inclusive role. (Annexure 12) In the post-Mandal era the idea of social justice was gravitated into polarized caste politics which saw the resurgence of OBCs as a formidable caste group in Bihar and also in the rest of India.

Thus social justice was asserted as the justice for the OBCs and other oppressed castes rather than for the whole of socio-economically marginalized class. The frequent reference of the *garib-gurba* (poor and oppressed) in the political diatribes of Laloo Yadav in fact was exclusive of the Upper Castes. However, the survey data indicated that the majority of 45.8% respondents among the three caste categories unanimously held that the economically weak of all caste categories should be brought under the purview of social justice. This included the 59.3% respondents affiliated to INC, 44.1% to BJP, 43.1% to JDU and the lowest 33.3% to Laloo yadav's party RJD. (Annexure 13)

In Bihar Laloo Yadav tried to champion the cause of the marginalized and oppressed in the initial years of his coming to the centerstage of state politics. He remained their undisputed leader in the state and succeeded in mobilizing the SCs and OBCs against the Upper Castes dominance. But his Yadav-centric politics soon disenchanted rest of the OBCs and SCs and also reduced his call for social justice to a mere political rhetoric. No wonder why the outcome of the field survey regarding ranking the chief minister who implemented social justice in the most effective manner endorsed Nitish Kumar as a far better performer than Laloo Yadav. 47.5% respondents among all caste categories

(SCs 51.2%, OBCs 50.8% and Upper Castes 40.5%) ranked Nitish Kumar as the best chief minister so far and most certainly much better than Laloo Yadav with regard to implementing social justice. (Annexure 14)

The framers of the Indian Constitution reiterated in several terms and at several occasions that social justice is the *raison d'être* of the republic and at any stage that has to remain the guiding principle to make any kind of provision or legislation. Directive Principles of the State Policy, Part IV of the Constitution though not enforceable by any court, nevertheless, articulates the aims and objectives of the State under the republican Constitution that is a 'welfare State' should be to promote the ideal of 'socio-economic justice.' The Indian Constitution thus ensures that social justice is always accorded prime consideration so that social harmony and the spirit of democracy could prevail which are essential for the sustenance of a 'Welfare State' and to put in practice the socialistic ideals. The demand for social justice was perhaps most vociferous in Bihar in recent times. No doubt, the awakening in the state against caste oppression and hegemony was about to break its soporific spell due to the rising political consciousness which also helped the oppressed castes politically mobilize and assert their socio-economic and political rights in the name of social justice.

Social Justice in Bihar

Social justice has been an important element of political discourse in Bihar for a long time. The ruling non-Congress coalitions made it their main political and electoral agenda. The expression acquired prominence in the political discourses and programmes of Laloo Yadav during the 1990s. Social justice, along with secularism was his main political and electoral plank. Laloo Yadav's social justice was overshadowed by Nitish Kumar's ingenious social engineering based on new caste combinations.

Naive in reality, but the reiteration of the term 'social justice' at numerous occasions in the political discourse became a political catchword among the pro-Mandal non-Congress political parties. The political discourse has had social justice in the perspective of caste rather than class. Among all the political leaders social justice was specially associated with Laloo Yadav and he was proclaimed to be its champion. Social justice reflects in Laloo Yadav's manifestos and programmes over the years. He provided a paradigm shift to social justice by creating a caste and religion (minority) nexus. Thus emerged his famous MY (Muslim-Yadav) equation which influenced the

electoral arithmetic by aligning other caste groups particularly the OBCs with his MY formation. It certainly obliterated the Upper Caste dominance from the political arena as the slogan of social justice fascinated the oppressed classes including both the SCs and the OBCs and helped them come together for the sake of attaining respectability and voice.

Laloo Yadav ensured that social justice provided a political sanctuary to both the oppressed and the minorities. While for the minorities social justice meant protection from the pro-Hindutva forces (branded as 'communal' in the political discourse) and for the oppressed and backward classes it meant end of the Upper Caste dominance and also oppression particularly in the rural areas. The Upper Castes in Bihar could now only play a secondary or supportive role in the OBCs led political parties. He was able to drive them towards the BJP and dent their confidence. But having successfully changed the caste arithmetic in political terms and driven away the stumbling blocks which came in the way of delivering social justice could Laloo Yadav really change the lot of the oppressed class whose cause he took up and championed? This question is often raised in the many contemporary political discourse on Bihar.

An average person in Bihar has different expectations from social justice. For example, for a landless labourer in the rural area, it may mean getting his wages from the landlord without reprisal and humiliation. The Scheduled Castes may expect treatment of equality and respect in the hands of the Upper Castes and the dominant Backward Castes. The MBCs and SCs would expect protection from the use of brutal state machinery by the Upper Castes to subvert their aspiration, on the other hand, the Upper Castes would expect to ensure a just order where they're neither victimized nor marginalized or discriminated against.

Laloo Yadav though set the tone of social justice in Bihar but in reality it turned out to be just another shade of the same castiest politics which the forward castes had been doing earlier. There is certainly no looking back from social justice but as Ramagundum (2005) reports:

“Bihar’s future lies in the recognition of Laloo’s contribution and in the onward march of the “social-justice” plank, which is lately stagnating in a self-debilitating inertia. On the other hand, an attempt

at denigration shall only reinforce his stature in the eye of his committed electorates. If that happens, the agenda of “social justice” shall silently wither away. That shall be the real tragedy with Bihar.” (Ramagundum, 2005: 10)

There is a growing realization that this lofty ideal of social justice has turned out to be ineffectual and discriminatory. The reservation-centric approach of social justice is criticized on two grounds. First – that it has divided the society into smaller factions of castes and second – it has not been able to identify the ‘creamy layer’ and segregate them so that the limited opportunities ensured by reservation actually reaches those among the weak and oppressed who need it the most. The CPI(ML) (Communist Party of India - Marxist Leninist), articulated the issue of social justice in its manifesto of 14th Lok Sabha elections of 2004:

“Social justice has been another popular slogan of the 1990s, but it is generally conceived in the restricted sense of reservation. Today with government jobs shrinking and a small creamy layer cornering most benefits of reservation – the NDA government has in fact raised the income ceiling for identification of the creamy layer from Rs. 1,00,000 to 2,50,000 – the slogan is liable to lose its meaning for a whole lot of people. Also, the continuing anti-poor violence in states like Bihar and UP, where hundreds of people, men as well as women, old as well as young and even children, belonging mostly to *Dalit*-backward-Muslim families have been butchered by private armies and the police, exposes the paradoxical perpetuation and even consolidation of social injustice behind the veneer of social justice. Naturally, the battle for social justice today has to be waged on a more meaningful basis, as part and parcel of the bigger battle for social transformation, and the creamy layers have to be prevented from hijacking the slogan and cornering its benefits.”

(CPI(ML) 14th Lok Sabha elections of 2004)

Some departure in redefining the guiding principle of social justice can however be found in the approach of the present chief minister Nitish Kumar who after his victory in the Assembly elections underlined the need to adopt a rather more inclusive approach.

Notwithstanding the social tension in the state, he thought will help achieve “socially comprehensive development”. Ramakrishanan (2006) reported in Frontline, (09-26 September 2006):

“When Nitish Kumar assumed office in November 2005 as the Chief Minister of Bihar, he envisaged new and creative dimensions to the State's socio-economic development, which he hoped would help advance the struggle for social justice in an innovative and non-confrontationist manner. He told this correspondent then: "The novel approach would seek to depart from mechanistic perceptions that sought to depict the struggle for social justice merely in terms of the social tussles between Upper Castes, *Dalit*, (OBCs) and Most Backward Castes (MBCs)." He said that "the new struggle would draw from all sections and work towards the overall development and betterment of society" keeping the slogan of *Agada, Pichada Ek Ho* (Forwards, Backwards Unite) as its guiding principle.” (Ramakrishanan, 09-26 Sept., 2006: 2)

In practice the social justice of Nitish Kumar however could also not look beyond the same old politics of reservation. With a realization that the MBCs have a soft corner for the Rashtriya Janta Dal and Lok Janashakti Party, he announced 20% reservation for the MBCs in the Panchayat. His government has already increased the quota for women in the Panchayat from 33 to 50% and 16% reservation for the *Dalit* already existed. Nitish Kumar's social justice has diminished the prospects of the Upper Castes participation in democratic polity. On the other hand, this political initiative has not impressed the MBCs as much as it has aroused their demand for greater participation and share in the state and national politics. The true electoral gain of this initiative is yet to be seen.

The True Spirit of Social Justice

The overriding spirit of social justice in the theological, philosophical and constitutional thoughts and provisions is concerned with establishing social harmony by ensuring overall wellbeing of the people. It thus can't afford to take a narrow or sectarian view of imparting justice to few at the cost of doing injustice to the rest. The Constitution of India though makes provision for 'distributive justice' which is based

on a kind of 'selective discrimination' to support the marginalized and weaker sections and thereby help them in their socio-economic upliftment. In doing so it does not enshrine any castiest perspective.

The spirit of the Constitution looked at social justice from the perspective of 'class' rather than 'caste'. Since the concept of caste is essentially hierarchical and discriminatory, it can't go along with the spirit of a 'Socialist' and 'Welfare State'. However, it's the insistence of the political class to interpret the provisions of socio-economic welfare in the Constitution meant for the 'weaker sections' of the society in the narrow context of 'caste'. Thus, it seems to be an extrapolation of the constitutional provisions for political gains. Whereas the Constitution in its spirit supports the 'weaker sections' irrespective of their caste as part of its provisions of social justice, the political class constraints its spirit by referring to certain castes or group of castes for obvious political gains. In practice, even after several decades of independence the most pronounced provision for the welfare of the 'weaker sections' has been sought to achieve through the policy of reservation which though discriminates on the basis of inter-caste socio-economic status but completely ignores the intra-caste socio-economic status. In order to better understand the true nature of caste conflict and the demand for social justice in Bihar one needs to first analyze it in its social, political and economic dimensions separately which otherwise encroach into each other's domain, and then collate the major findings to get a macro-perspective of caste conflict.

SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF CASTE CONFLICT

A large portion of political discourse related to Bihar deals with the socio-economic and political conflict of caste. The social dimension of caste conflict is important because caste conflict develops on the social plane largely due to social discrimination. The social issues of caste identity, creation of caste associations and federations, caste carnages and social justice in Bihar are important to understand the social dynamics of caste conflict in the State. There can't be a clear demarcation to segregate caste conflicts exclusively on social, political and economic basis. Their boundaries are permeable and often overlapping. It's important to note that when the simmering social and economic discontent is mobilized by the political forces and given political leadership it turns into a bigger conflict.

Assertion of Caste Identity

At the social level the issue of identity plays an important role in caste conflict. It's essentially motivated by a kind of sectarian community approach which makes the castes assert to achieve higher *Varna*, higher social status and greater share in economic and political power structure depending upon their status in the socio-economic-religious hierarchy. But it often causes mutual mistrust, counter mobilization and in extreme cases series of violent conflict and hatred which is discussed separately in the chapters ahead. Jha (1998) observed that the trend of sectarianism and casteism began to emerge as a social force to reckon with during the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Bihar. In the present times assertion of caste identity is largely motivated by economic and political interest. The survey data amply supported the fact.

As per the data the majority 44.6% respondents among the three caste categories held that the assertion of caste identity was primarily due to the vested political and economic interest of the various castes. Separately the view was endorsed by SCs (58.5%) and Upper Castes (46.8%). However among the OBCs the highest (39.2%) believed that caste groups assert for their caste identity just to attain political dominance while a slightly lesser 38.3% endorsed both political and economic dominance as the cause of the assertion of caste identity in Bihar. Among the political parties the respondents affiliated to BJP (42.4%) supported the view of political dominance alone. But respondents

affiliated to all other political parties INC (37%), RJD (46.7%), JDU (55.4%) and Neutral and Others (43.2%) supported both, the political and economic interest as the cause of assertion for caste identity. (Annexure 15)

It's also noteworthy that the identity of a caste is largely determined by the social stereotypes, popular perceptions and prejudices. Each caste is subjected to this treatment by other castes and there is often a restlessness to prove the stereotypes wrong with regard to the traditional hierarchy in the *Varna* system and in terms of *Sanskritization*. Sinha and Sinha (1967) in their study conducted on 200 students of Patna University on a scale of 100 characteristics observed that "the caste stereotypes explored did not record appreciable change when compared with the stereotypes reported by other authors" and that "the traditional functions assigned to the castes seem to have greatly influenced the caste stereotypes held by the students." [Sinha and Sinha, 1967: 42]

The caste stereotypes are a mix of largely considered virtues and vices. Hence according to the aforesaid study a *Brahminis* ranked high on culture and equally high on greed. Ahir (or Yadav) is ranked highest on being blunt and low in bravery. Bania is regarded as miser and coward. A Rajput is brave yet castiest and proud. Kayastha is largely considered intelligent and cultured yet cunning and showy. Bhumihaar scores highest on being castiest among all castes, ambitious, clever and good looking. Kurmi is considered industrious, cultured and yet backward. Chamar is typecast as backward, crooked and ugly and the only virtue he possesses is being industrious.

The deep rooted caste prejudices which help create such stereotypes still exist. It's however important to note that while these stereotypes are based on broad perceptions of a caste as a group and carried on for generations, an individual member's traits may not necessarily conform to them. Thus caste identity becomes an important issue of assertion and conflict which is spearheaded by the caste associations or *Sabhas*¹¹. Caste association is a voluntary grouping of caste or its cluster. It's also a group which people join voluntarily out of interest. Rodolph and Rudolph (1967) call it a 'para-community' whose membership is determined both by birth, choice and identification. The identification may manifest as providing financial and moral support to its various

¹¹ Sabha is a *Sanskrit* word also used in Hindi to denote the assembly of men.

activities, attending its meeting and abiding by its consensus decisions. The *Sabha* is a formal body having its own constitution, office, office bearers and a publication which works as its ideological mouthpiece.

Welfare of the fellow castemen is often the motive and aspiration of the honorary workers. In the context of caste it needs to be noted that the caste (*jati*) *Sabha* is organizationally different from a caste *Panchayat* (council). Caste *Sabha* works on a highly organized system. In caste associations the role, relationships and responsibilities are well-defined and structured. Verma (1979: 3) in his study of caste associations refers to the observations of Kahare (1970: 12) and Bailey (1962: 131). Khare (1970) points out that the characteristic of a *Sabha* is that it involves modern organizational rationality.

Bailey (1962) holds the view that it's the element of competition in the *Sabha* which contrasts it to the old caste *Panchayat*. The traditional caste *Panchayat* usually remains confined within the boundaries of a village and endogamous circle levels and its main function is to resolve internal caste disputes. Mandelbaum (1972: 19-22) considers *Sabha* to be the *Panchayat* of the entire caste cluster, serving the general interest of the caste at the macro-level.

The caste *Panchayat* and *Sabha* of a given caste can exist and work simultaneously in their own respective spheres and pursue defined mandate. As against *Panchayat* the leadership of a caste *Sabha* is not hereditary but is determined on the basis of one's ability to give leadership to the entire community in matters of safeguarding its interest. This underscores the fact that caste *Sabhas* are the offshoots of the growing competition and conflict among different castes and that they work as a kind of defense mechanism to either maintain the traditional hegemony or to improve the socio-economic status and political stature of the castes. As against them, the caste *Panchayat* had a much smaller agenda and mandate and it mostly dealt with arbitrations in case of intra-caste and in some cases in inter-caste disputes.

Various castes of all the three categories had been trying to discover their identity and establish their place high in the *Varna* order. This has been a reason for the polarization of the polity on caste lines which converts castes into political entities and thus ready to confront each other. Nandy (1996) reported in New York Times that the political and

economic growth of the middle and lower castes has changed politics beyond recognition and therefore, he added, caste is now a principal of political mobilization rather than a matter of ritualistic distance. But the process of reinventing a caste's *pehchan* (identity), asserting to restore its *swabhiman* (self-respect) and ensuring its *haq* and *bhagidari* (rightful claim and participation) actually began in the pre-independence days itself on the social plane. Scholars trace the upcoming of caste associations in (North) India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which started searching for a socially respectable identity within the *Varna* system.

The assertion for caste identity is not confined to the Upper Castes alone. There're enough examples of the Kurmi, the Yadav and the *Dalit* asserting their caste identity on the socio-political spheres during the pre and post-independence era. The assertion for identity can also be explained in terms of *Sanskritization* both of the Brahmanical and *Kashtriya* models. While the Bhumihar tried to emulate the Brahmanical model for higher *Varna* status under the process of *Sanskritization*, the dominant Backward Castes in Bihar namely the Yadav, the Kurmi and the Koeri tried to emulate the *Kashtriya* model.

Kayastha Assertion for Identity

The Kayastha tried to organize themselves as caste association as early as 1887 by forming *All India Kayastha Sabha* which held its first conference at Lucknow. In Bihar the *Kayastha* were the first to organize a caste association. In the background of Lucknow conference was a wealthy Kayastha philanthropist lawyer Kali Prasad of Lucknow who founded the *Kayastha Dharma Sabha* prior to his death in 1886. He also established the *Kayastha Pathshala*¹² at his residence which was later shifted to Allahabad and with the passage of time turned into a High School teaching students up to the entrance level of Calcutta University.

By 1890s *Kayastha Sabha Hind* became the front running caste organization of Kayastha and was able to draw influential, well-off and English educated urban elites to promote the cause of fraternity among the various caste-groups. At one point of time, the *Sabha* even appealed the member of the community to take up other respectable professions such as trade and business instead of carrying on with their traditional

¹² Kayastha Schools

profession. Though an urban educated caste since long, Kayastha were also the first to take up western education and settle in administrative positions and professions under the British Raj and established their identity as a working caste of professionals and administrators. But during the British period Bengalis¹³ were given preference over the Kayastha in the administrative services in Bihar despite their matching qualification. The discrimination against Kayastha over the Bengalis was deeply felt and thus the *All India Kayastha Sabha*, came to Bihar and became the first Kayastha Association in the state as early as 1887.

Jai Prakash Lal of Bihar with the help of the *All India Kayastha Sabha* brought out a series of publications for social reform. During the initial period of its establishment several community building and welfare steps were taken by the *All-India Kayastha Sabha* in Bihar which included setting up of *Kayastha Pathshala* (Kayastha School) and a large boarding house to accommodate 100 students. At Arrah, a small town in Bihar, a Kayastha Trading Company was also set up to encourage the community members to take up business as a profession besides service. The national fund for helping poor meritorious students was set up which soon helped nearly a dozen students to go to England for higher studies.

There's no doubt that the competition with the Bengalis over the share in employment and hegemony in services and administration were a major cause of concern which united the Kayastha in the state. The Kayastha started raising concern over the backwardness of the state and attributed it to its administrative control in Bengal of which it was a part. Mahesh Narayan, the founder editor of *Kayastha Gazette* also started a newspaper *Bihar Times* in 1889. He's also regarded as the founder father of journalism in Bihar. His writings highlighted the backwardness of Bihar and attributed it to the Bengalis which first helped the Bihari Kayastha to rise against the Bengali dominance and later mobilized the entire state for the partition of Bihar from Bengal. The partition movement gained momentum during 1906 and subsequently in 1912 Bihar and Orissa were separated from Bengal.

However, *The Kayastha Sabhas* like other caste associations also couldn't muster much influence on its members despite the leadership and association of the noblemen and elites of their time like Raja Inder Karan who was the son of Raja Murli Manohar of

¹³ The natives of Bengal, the state adjoining Bihar

Hyderabad (Deccan), Raja Rajeshwari Lal, Dr Rajendra Prasad (the First President of India), Dr. Sachhidanand Sinha (the first President of the Constituent Assembly) and their like. Carroll (1977) attributed the concerns of the Kayastha philanthropists patrons to the larger well-being of the society which made the association fund starved. According to her, no wealthy Kayastha patron only patronized Kayastha projects and they didn't figure very high in their priority. But the lack of fund, jealousy and personal rivalry of this typical working class could never help it emerge stronger as a caste group and today the greatest crisis it faces is the lack of political representation. On the social domain, it's not regarded as a potent political force anymore in Bihar and elsewhere despite its strong presence and active participation in freedom movement and national politics for a long time and noticeable presence in the enviable administrative, educational, corporate and other sectors. The *Kayastha Sabha* is facing the crisis of political identity and space in contemporary Bihar and India.

Bhumihar Assertion for Identity

The Bhumihar in Bihar formed the *Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha* in 1889 at Patna. The most talked about account of the origin of Bhumihar is considered to be one which has been given by Swami Sahjanand Saraswati in his book titled "*Brahmarshi Vansha Vistar*" (1915). It's in this book published in the year 1915 where the association of Bhumihar with the "Brahmarshi" (Parshuram – the *Brahmin* warrior sage who annihilated the deviant *Kashtriya* according to the Hindu mythology) is first made.

The first *Bhumihar Brahman Mahasabha* took place in 1889 at Muzaffarpur in North Bihar under the leadership of Langat Singh to assert for the Brahmanical identity and status for Bhumihar. Unlike the Kayastha the biggest issue facing the Bhumihar was not job holding as they had sufficient landed property to take care of them. They faced the crisis of identity because the Brahmin¹⁴ were not ready to consider them as part of the Brahmanical fold. It was in a way an assertion for achieving the identity of higher *Varna*. Later on it was taken up by Swami Sahjanand Saraswati who hailed from Eastern UP. Swami Sahjanand Saraswati as early as 1914 got involved in the social reform movement of the *Bhumihar Brahman Mahasabha* and remained its anchor person for the next eleven years. Hauser (1997) wrote:

¹⁴ The word *Brahman* and *Brahmin* refer to the same caste but are spelt differently

“Swami Sahajanand Saraswati writing in 1940 about the Provincial Council elections of late 1926, and the Legislative Assembly elections of early 1937 in Bihar, commented on the role of caste and factionalism in the politics of those decades in terms that appear entirely familiar today. He writes 'that there is very little difference between nationalism and casteism, and it is a difference which disappears at a certain stage.... The only real difference is that caste covers a relatively smaller field whereas nationalism functions in a wider arena.'” (Hauser, 1997: 49)

The issues before the *Mahasabha* were essentially that of self-respect and to establish the status of the Bhumihar as real *Brahmin* among the *Brahmin* community of eastern U.P. and Bihar. It's different that for Sahjanand the politics of caste identity was not all that important and he gave greater importance to the nationalist politics under the influence of Gandhi. Hauser (1997) is of the view that despite making his political debut with the issue of caste identity of Bhumihar he had a more liberal and nationalist outlook and therefore he refused to accept the British loyalist Sir Ganesh Dutt Singh as the President of the *Sabha* in 1929 at its Monghyr session which eventually caused its dissolution.

Sahajanand's political horizon was much wider than the confines of caste and his vision much broader than his own castemen. As compared to him, Sir Ganesh Dutt, a loyalist, a prominent public figure, Minister of the Local Self Government of Bihar and Orissa and above all, the most important ideologue of the Bhumihar interest in Bihar didn't have that liberal outlook. It was due to the influence and clout of Sir Ganesh Dutt among Bhumihar that even important leader like Shri Krishna Singh preferred to stay with him during the 1929 conflict in the Bhumihar Sabha which was precipitated by Sahajanand. Although Sahajanand and many of his Swaraj Party colleagues had to face strong opposition by Ganesh Dutt in the Legislative Council on a number of policy issues.

Hauser (1997) referred to Sahajanand's comments on the 1926 Council elections which throws some light on the mobilization and conflict on caste lines which he considered deplorable:

“I can never forget the highly improper behaviour I witnessed at the time of that election. Among other things, factionalism of the most

blatant kind characterized all party politics. Even the most prominent Congress leaders were talking and mobilizing themselves in terms of caste. This could not have been done openly but that it was happening quietly and behind closed doors was apparent to all. Based on my experiences not only of that election, but of all other elections since, I must say with due apologies for this apparent impudence, that most nationalist leaders of Bihar are fundamentally casteist.” (Hauser, 1997: 13)

In Bihar, Bhumihar are considered a politically volatile community. Although they constitute a rather small proportion of the Bihar population which is estimated to be around 2.8%, nevertheless, they have always wielded political strength in pre-Mandal politics of Bihar. Since the bifurcation of Bihar in 2000, the percentage of Bhumihar population has risen to 6 percent due to the overall decrease in the state’s population and therefore all political parties are vying for their votes. Not only that, due to their special fixation to landed property, common tradition of acquiring and possessing land the feudal mindset has given them the identity of an oppressor caste which has been the perpetrator and the victim of a series of retaliatory caste violence during the decade of 1990s. Even today, they are a major land owning caste in Bihar who are socially, economically and politically much better off too than many other castes in the state and still mobilize to safeguard their interest in land.

On the social and political domain their traditional rivalry with the Kayastha and the Rajput among the Upper Castes is an open secret. After the rise of Laloo Yadav on Bihar’s political scene and the upsurge in the Backward Caste politics the Bhumihar became their target too. However, Bhumihar decided to make a strategic truce with Laloo Yadav because as a caste they could ill afford to fight the ultra-leftist outfits on the one hand and face the wrath of the undisputed OBC leader on the other. Despite all social upheavals Bhumihar remain a potent social and political entity in Bihar. So, after losing the reins of power in the state, the main antagonist of Bhumihar Laloo Yadav decided to mend fence with them and tried to woo them to regain his lost bastion in Bihar by creating a new political caste equation. In the era of coalition politics they again stand a better chance to revive their eroded social and political clout as caste combination is the new mantra as against caste dominance.

Kurmi Assertion for Identity

The Kurmi caste formed its first association as early as 1894 at Lucknow to protest against the British government's decision to disqualify them from the Police services. The first All India Sabha of the Kurmi took place in 1894 itself under the presidentship of an advocate named Gendalal belonging to Farukhabad in Uttar Pradesh. Conceding to the protest of the association the then British government revised its decision. This may be considered as the first major milestone in the history of the Kurmi caste association. Since it was the very first occasion when Kurmi had mobilized to hold a *Sabha* to safeguard the caste interest, it was also decided to prepare the history of the Kurmi subsequently in the light of (a) Hindu scripture and myth (b) comparative study of the customs and ritual of the caste with other castes and (c) opinion of the scholars of history [Verma, 1979: 14]. The President of the *Sabha* claimed that the "Kurmi" comprises of various similar castes like Kunbi, Kurambi, Kanbi, Kulambi, Patidar, Patel, Kapu, Okkalinga, Reddy, Naidu and Maratha spread over different parts of India. Having realized the need to make their presence felt a move was made to incorporate the aforesaid peasant castes across India in the Kurmi fold [Verma, 1979: 14].

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century in 1910, the *All India Kurmi Kashtriya Mahasabha* was in place. It called upon all its members to wear the sacred thread and a demand for more job reservation. In order to achieve the *Kashtriya* status the Ramanandi sect traced the Kurmi' ancestry to Luv, the valiant son of Lord Rama, the legendary Hindu God incarnated. The first effort to establish the mythological linkage of the Kurmi was made by Ganesh Swami Sadhu Singh in 1895 when he tried to trace the history of the caste to *Skand Puran* and inferred that the root of the term Kurmi lays in the *Sanskrit* term *Kurm* and that Kurmi is synonymous to Kunbi and Kanbi. He prepared the first 'Kurmi Bansabali' (Kurmi Genealogy). It paved way for several other publications tracing the history of the Kurmi notable among them were '*Kurmi Kashtriya Darpan*' (1910) and '*Kashtra Kuladarsh*' (1912) by Devi Prasad Singh and '*Kurmi Kashtriya Itihas*' (1936) by Siva Prasad Singh.

The caste historians also tried to affiliate the origin to the *Kashtriya* dynasties namely *Surya*, *Chandra*, *Yadu* and *Sesha*. Efforts were also made to link the caste with some of the native royalties of Kolhapur, Devas, Scindia and also to Shivaji Maharaj the greatest Maratha King. However, as time passed by and the socio-political scenario changed in India, the new generation Kurmi of 1960s expressed their disapproval to this *Kashtriya*

fixation as the 'backward class' identity proved to be more beneficial socially and politically.

The first Bihari¹⁵ President of the *Sabha* was an advocate from Patna named Mithila Saran Singh who presided over the Third Annual Conference held at Pilibhit in UP in 1896 and it was attended by a large number of 'advanced section' of the caste from Bihar. Later around the first decade of the twentieth century in order to establish the horizontal solidarity among the various Kurmi clans in the fold, the *Sabha* was registered at Patna in Bihar on March 5, 1910 as '*All India Kurmi Kashtriya Mahasabha*'. The objectives of the *All India Kurmi Kashtriya Sabha* according to its draft constitution of 1909 were as under:

- i) To promote unity and solidarity among the different sections of the community
- ii) To promote social, material and overall welfare of the community
- iii) To make the facility of education available to the Kurmi children by opening schools, hostels and libraries
- iv) To educate people adopt new educational practices
- v) To publish caste journals and newspapers with a view to keep the people in touch with each other and
- vi) To raise funds by means of donation, subscription to meet the aforesaid objectives

The Kurmi who initially united to safeguard their interest in profession (Government service) in 1894 later used this caste unison to achieve higher caste status under the traditional caste system. But it remained elusive and later became redundant with the changed political reality which made the 'backward identity' socially and politically prudent. Together with the Yadav and Koeri the Kurmi tried to form the 'Triveni Sangh' but it fizzled out as the Yadav tried to impose their supremacy and leadership. With their persistent efforts for *Sanskritization* the Kurmi have achieved higher social, political and economic status as compared to many other castes among the OBCs, in Bihar. They're also regarded as the 'Kulaks' among the OBCs. In terms of education they are above their political rival Yadav and also pose a formidable challenge to the Yadav's claim for the OBCs leadership in Bihar.

¹⁵ The term refers to the natives of the state of Bihar.

Yadav Assertion for Identity

The Yadav have from the historical time of ancient India considered themselves similar to *Kashtriya* due to their martial traits. The mythical association with Lord Krishna – the legendary Yaduvanshi king is sought to assert their historical and mythological identity. Politics is something which they claim to be well-versed with from their birth and democracy their primordial understanding since the days of Lord Krishna. Yadav as a caste believe that all the pastoral castes of India are the descendents of the Yadav dynasty to which Lord Krishna a cow-herder himself, belonged to. Today, the Yadav are sub-divided into different clans known as Yaduvanshi, Gollavanshi, Nandavanshi and so on. However, they believe that all of them belong to the clan of Lord Krishna. Tracing the beginning of the Yadav caste association known as *All India Yadav Mahasabha* (AIYM) which was set up in 1924 Michelutti (2004) noted:

“By the end of 19th century, selected representatives of Krishna together with the creation of a ‘suitable’ past began to be elaborated by the Ahir/Yadav caste associations. The latter used these sets of religious symbols to improve Yadav status in the traditional Hindu caste hierarchy. By 1924, the AIYM advocated vegetarianism and teetotalism. In principle, internal inequalities and hierarchies between different subdivisions were suppressed by making all Ahirs, Goallas, Gopas and other ‘pure’ and ‘superior’ Krishnavanshi Yadavs.” (Michelutti, 2004: 49)

In the Hindi belt of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh Yadav suffer from a dubious social stereotype of being a politically assertive yet a largely uneducated, unrefined, stubborn lot. Besides jokes and popular perceptions, the fact remains that years of illiteracy, poverty and social neglect particularly by the Upper Castes has made them lag even behind many other castes in Bihar including their other Backward Caste counterparts like Awadhia Kurmi, Bania and Koeri in terms of education and opportunity to better professions. Nevertheless, ever since 1970s Yadav have been at the forefront of North Indian politics (including Bihar) and have led the Backward Class movement which Yadav (2000) referred to as the “second democratic upsurge”. They became all the more politically important after the 1990s when the electoral results became handiwork of crafted caste engineering.

Being attached to land and agriculture besides carrying on their traditional pastoral profession the Yadav along with Kurmi and Koeri the two Other Backward Classes, were substantially benefitted by the green revolution in India. Thus, their improved economic status backed by their numerical strength (having the largest number among the OBCs often pegged at 11% of the total OBC population) has given them the identity of arguably the most dominant caste among the OBCs. Yadav are not only aware of it but have also asserted it on the social and political spheres.

In Bihar the Yadav even organized their own caste army in 1983 at the Nalanda district of central Bihar known as Lorik Sena which was involved in many caste carnages in Bihar including Kharakpura in 1984, Neelampur and Jeenpura in 1986. As a matter of fact, Yadav are one of the most composite castes in Bihar having a range of big landlords to huge number of agricultural labourer. Besides that, there is a sizeable population which is daily-wage earner and *Bataidar* (sharecropper). Their sizeable population and commensurating combativeness made them an ideal choice for giving leadership to the Backward class against the traditional Upper Castes dominance on the social-political and economic domains.

The caste association of the Yadav named *Yadav Mahasabha* was founded in 1924 at Allahabad as a registered society and declared as a cultural association to foster unity among the castemen, reform their custom and promote education among them. To reaffirm their martial status similar to the *Kashtriya* they even demanded to raise a regiment of Yadav in the Indian army considering their display of valour during the Chinese aggression of 1962. The Mandal Report which created a revolution in Bihar and revitalized the identity of the Backward Castes was especially beneficial for the Yadav in Bihar who were also numerically quite dominant. The 15 years of Laloo *raj* (rule) bolstered the economic and political status of Yadav in the state. They became economically better off and politically even more powerful.

For Bihar suffering from the prolonged and violent caste conflict it was a kind of boon in disguise as Yadav who mainly constituted the Maoist outfits, gradually withdrew from the dreaded Maoist organization MCC which also caused the decline of caste carnages perpetrated by the Ranbir Sena and the Naxal outfits in central Bihar. Though in terms of caste identity Yadav's assertion for acquiring *Kashtriya* status may not have received any social acceptance so far, but their traditional demographic and present political

predominance have certainly established their identity as a dominant caste which now calls the shots. In the politics of Bihar they are the axis of caste coalition which political parties can ignore only at their peril.

***Dalit* Identity and Leadership**

While the assertion of identity among the Upper Castes and the OBCs had been seen among the individual castes than caste groups, among the *Dalit* or the Scheduled Castes it was more of a unified assertion for the *Dalit*¹⁶ identity as a whole. There's no doubt that at the political level, the assertion for *Dalit* identity had been more pronounced in the neighbouring Uttar Pradesh than in Bihar. The *Dalit* in Uttar Pradesh are more organized under the strong leadership which emerged from among the *Dalit* themselves. The constant efforts made by the leaders like Kanshi Ram and her protégée Mayawati to unite the oppressed class politically has also made the politics of Uttar Pradesh revolve around the two axes of OBCs and *Dalit*.

Kanshi Ram must be credited with the contribution he made to organize the Scheduled Castes politically, make them a political force to reckon with in the northern India and to give them a political identity. His contribution also had its impact in the neighbouring Bihar. His slogans like “*vote hamara raj tumhara, nahin chalega, nahin chalega*” (our vote and your rule will not do) during the early phase of Kanshi Ram's political career set the tone for the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) politics which wanted to turn the pyramid upside down and for which it was necessary to harp on the issue of *Dalit* identity.

Babu Jagjivan Ram was certainly the tallest *Dalit* leader from Bihar who was also among the topmost leaders in the national politics. Another leader Ram Sundar Das who also served as Bihar's chief minister during April 1979 to February 1980 belonged to the *Dalit* community. But neither Babu Jagjivan Ram nor Ram Sundar Das did exclusively the *Dalit* politics. Unlike Kanshi Ram or Mayawati, they are known more as *Dalit* leaders than the leaders of the *Dalit*. In a way, Jagjivan Ram was co-opted by the Upper Castes and for a major part of his political career he remained with the Congress Party which as it is had a traditional political bonhomie with the Scheduled

¹⁶ The term *Dalit* refers to the group of Scheduled Castes. Gandhi's social ideology termed them *Harijan* out of empathy. As against that *Dalit* is a more contemporary and political loaded idiom which seems to allude uprise, awakening and assertion among a group of castes due to the context in which the term is used.

Castes. Therefore, within the Congress Party he was not the sole voice of the oppressed class.

Ram Sundar Das has a socialist background which believed in classless and casteless society, as such he also didn't indulge too much into the *Dalit* politics. In Bihar, both Ramvilas Paswan and Laloo Yadav also tried to win over the *Dalit*. To bring the Dusadh (one of the *Mahadalit* and a dominant *Dalit* caste in Bihar) in their political fold both Laloo Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan organized function to celebrate the Dusadh folk hero Chuharmal even at the cost of annoying the Upper Castes. Not only that, the assertion of *Dalit* identity has also identified some other folk heroes and heroines such as Balmiki, Eklavya, Kabir, Raidas, Phule, Periyar, Jhalkaribai and many more to sharpen the socio-political discourse of identity among the *Dalit*.

Contrary to Uttar Pradesh, in Bihar besides the Congress, the *Dalit* have traditionally been given leadership by the left parties to whom at least in principle class identity is a bigger concern than the caste identity. In Bihar, the leftist ideology and literature have a much deeper impact on the *Dalit* intelligentsia. The fact that to fight back against the Upper Castes' and OBCs oppression *Dalit* united under the leftist outfit (Maoist Communist Centre) MCC is a case in point.

Dalit Literature and Identity

The *Dalit* have also faced the problem of identity and certainly much more than the Upper Castes or the OBCs. On the intellectual plain, they have defended their existence by reinventing their history in which the *Dalit* literature and history has played a major role. They are not the literature written about the *Dalit* by others but by the *Dalit* themselves to put their own perspective for their people. The Ambedkar Mission Prakashan set up in Patna in 1978 had till 2001 published 22 booklets and 14 books with exclusive historical contents on the *Dalit*. The contemporary *Dalit* literature in different Indian languages has set into motion a kind of reawakening and a psychological revolution among them.

The *Vimukthi Geetham* (Telugu, 1998) of Dr. Katti Padmarao emphasizes that the *Dalit* are the original inhabitant of the Indus civilization but on their own soil they have been made untouchable. Nagaiah [2010: 31] referred to the Kannada scholar Aravinda Malagatti's views on *Dalit* literature who said that *Dalitism* of a *Dalit* could simply be

caught and held by directly narrating experience. He also stated that the *Dalit* literature is about changing people. The *Dalit* literature to him was a rebel poetry which after centuries of oppression became an expression of anger, a scolding which is filled with abuse.

***Dalit* Slogans and Political Discourse**

The assertion for identity is not only visible in the *Dalit* literature but also in the kind of political terminology *Dalit* leaders use. Narayan (2001) noted that these changes not only appeared in the popular *Dalit* literature but also crept into language of the '*Dalit* Politics' of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. According to Narayan (2001) these alteration in the political language of the BSP of Uttar Pradesh, the *Dalit* Sena of Bihar and in the language of the *Dalit* politics is easily discernable.

The *Dalit* certainly are in search of a new identity. They also are trying to determine their significant contributions to the society, identify their folk heroes and their wisdom which according to them has been ignored. New political slogans such as “*Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar, inko maaro joote char*”¹⁷ have certainly set the tone for the *Dalit* political discourse. The overtly scathing tone of hatred and an offensive posturing of *Dalit* leaders wield the charisma of uniting the *Dalit* for the common cause of identity, power and prestige.

The caste politics has organized the oppressed class *Dalit* politically. In Bihar Ram Vilas Paswan supported a *Dalit Shiksha Aandolan* (*Dalit* Educational Movement) and also actively participated in the programmes of the Ambedkar Mahasabha for obvious political gains. Indian People's Front (IPF) which is considered an organization of the *Dalit* in Bihar also floated a *Dalit* Mahasabha in UP in October 1993. In the recent years there also have been socio-political endeavours to co-opt their cause and concern by the Upper Caste Hindus and political parties alike. The real social justice for the *Dalit* may follow once they enjoy a more cordial relationship with other castes. Thus for the *Dalit*, their issue of identity is certainly not about their political identity and their participation

¹⁷ The abrasive slogan of the BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party) Tilak-wearing Brahmin, Tarazu (balance) holding Vaisyas and Talwar (sword)-wielding Kshatriyas: beat them all with shoes. It was part of the political discourse during the ascendancy of the BSP as a political party of the *Dalit*, by the *Dalit* during the 1980s.

in political governance alone, it's also about ensuring their participation in the social and economic processes in a democratic and homogenous manner.

In the contemporary context, the politics of caste identity helps more as a force for political mobilization than social upliftment. The identity of a caste is now also merging with the identity of a caste group and working as a force multiplier for social and political purposes. Caste identity is thus essentially being harnessed for political purposes, convenience and opportunism in the present socio-political scenario more than ensuring social justice.

Caste Carnages in a Perspective

In the vernacular lexicon of Hindi '*jativad*' is the closer term to explain casteism which people in Bihar consider a major source of conflict between different castes and caste groups. On the social plain, the long series of caste carnages in Bihar may also be analyzed in the perspective of acute casteism which has gripped most of the castes and practiced vehemently by all caste groups irrespective of their status in the ritualistic caste hierarchy.

During 1976 to 2001, 46 major caste carnages took place in Bihar in which hundreds of men, women and children belonging to various castes lost their life. This mindless spate of violence was perpetrated by socio-economic factors like mutual prejudices, suspicion and antipathy prevalent among castes on the one hand and impoverishment and economic oppression of the oppressed castes by the dominant castes on the other.

The caste conflicts in Bihar particularly those which by nature were violent conflicts, though had both 'class' and a 'caste' character but were often dubbed as 'caste conflict' or 'caste struggle' between the dominant and weak or subordinate castes. Chakravarti (2001) argued that dubbing such conflicts as 'caste conflict' postulates a 'false dichotomy' between caste and class in rural Bihar. However, the line of distinction between 'caste' and 'class' often appeared fuzzy in the context of caste violence in Bihar. In the initial years of caste violence the perpetrators were largely the dominant Upper Castes militias who were also the socio-economically dominant class.

However, in the later years under the influence of the ultra-left ideology preached by the Naxalites the socio-economically weaker sections of the society who also belonged to the group of the traditionally marginalized and oppressed castes got organized and subjected the dominant Upper Castes to ruthless Naxalite retaliation. In other words, it

was a unique kind of ‘class-struggle’ which got mobilized on caste lines and thus looked like a ‘caste struggle’. Various factors in varying degree led to the intermittent caste violence in Bihar which turned the rural Bihar into the killing field for several years. The traditional prejudices of the Upper Castes against the OBCs and SCs, the exploitation by the dominant OBCs, the growing political consciousness among the castes were to name a few. The growing political consciousness appeared to be the most dominant factor among all which has also been vindicated by the survey data. The data indicated that cumulatively the highest 37.1% respondents among the three caste categories attributed the growing political consciousness among all castes as the prime cause of intermittent caste violence over the years. This included 39.2% Upper Castes and 36.7% OBCs who supported the view. This opinion was also endorsed by most of the respondents affiliated to various political parties – INC (48.1%), RJD (40%), JDU (35.4%) and Neutral and Others (40.5%). Nevertheless, the SCs placed at the bottom of the traditional caste hierarchy and were subjected to discrimination and oppression by both the Upper Castes and OBCs slightly differed in their views and therefore 36.6% of them thought it was the traditional Upper Castes’ prejudice which caused intermittent caste violence. (Annexure 16) The spate of caste violence which began during 1976 gradually became more organized in terms of mobilization of castes and influence of political ideology and veiled political support to the warring caste groups.

At the social plain one finds conflict between the dominant castes and weaker castes not just for social hierarchy, but also for political and economic status. While the Upper Castes in Bihar remain concerned about their status and hegemony, the *Dalit* and the Backward Castes have rallied around to gain ‘dignity’ – social, political and economic equality and even challenged the Upper Castes traditional authority.

Emergence of Caste Armies in Bihar

The Dalelchak Baghora caste carnage of 1987 wherein 56 Rajput were attacked by *Dalit* and Yadav belonging to the left outfit Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) was a fight for both dignity and against the feudal oppression by the Upper Castes. On the other hand, to safeguard their interest and protect themselves from the ultra-leftist Naxalite¹⁸ outfits’

¹⁸ Naxalite, Naxal, Naxalvadi are identical terms referring to the ultra-left radical communists who believe in the Maoist political ideologies of bringing about revolution through the power of gun. The movement first begun with a violent uprising at Naxalbari in the state of West Bengal

such as CPI (ML) Liberation, Party Unity and the MCCI onslaughts, the Upper Castes Bhumihar and Rajput landlords in the state raised their own caste armies such as Savarna liberation Army, Sunlight Sena, Brahmarshi Sena, Kuer Sena and Kisan Morcha. Ranvir Sena, a caste army of the upper caste Rajput and Bhumihar (otherwise traditional arch rivals) acquired notorious image for the series of bloodshed ever since its formation in 1994 to fight against the organized *Dalit*, Backward Castes and Naxalite who sided with them. Most of the conflicts had a social dimension of maintaining the traditional social hegemony and thereby safeguarding economic interest. The caste carnages which Ranvir Sena unleashed are as under:

- 11 July 1996 - Bathani Tola, Sahar Block, Bhojpur district; Ranvir Sena commits the first massacre. Nineteen CPI-ML supporters killed by nearly sixty Sena men in retaliation of the killing of nine Sena men around the same area a few months ago.
- March - April 1997 - Ranvir Sena butchers ten Muslims and eight *Dalit* in two different villages. Retaliation of April 20 attack by two hundred armed persons of the CPI-ML Party Unity who attacked a BJP MLA, allegedly responsible for the earlier attack. His house blown up and six hard-core supporters of the Sena killed.
- December 1, 1997 – Laxmanpur Bathe, Jehanabad district; Sena kills sixty-three *Dalit*, including sixteen children. Five teenage girls raped and later shot dead. Village raided at night by nearly two hundred fifty Sena members. Victims sympathizers of the CPI-ML Liberation.
- January 1999 - Shankarbigha, Jehanabad district; Ranvir Sena kills twenty-two lower-caste men, women, and children. The village is only 10 kilometers away from Laxmanpur Bathe where the earlier massacre took place.
- April 1999 – Sandani, Gaya district; Sena men in two groups of fifty kills twelve Yadav including a ten-year-old child with automatic weapon. Killing in revenge of the thirty-four Bhumihar killed in Senari village a month ago by the squads of the MCC men.

in 1967 and ever since then this ultra-leftist movement which spread in other parts of the country as well acquired the name Naxalite.

- June 2000 - Miapur, Aurangabad district; Sena men in a gang of 200 Bhumihar kill thirty-five Yadav men, women, and children. Retaliation of the killing of thirteen Bhumihar killed in Newada district, a week ago in retaliation of the killing of three Kurmi.

As reported in Frontline (September 14-27, 2002) Ranvir Sena's chief Brahmeshwar Singh alias 'Mukhiya' belonging to the landed Bhumihar caste was (arrested in Patna in 2002), is alleged to be responsible for 36 massacres of the oppressed class which took place at Lakshmanpur-Bathe, Mianpur, Shankarbigaha, Bathe, Sarthua, Nagari, Haibaspur, Bathani Thola and Santani left nearly 400 people dead. All these villages are located in Bhojpur, Jehanabad and Gaya districts of central Bihar. The caste conflict of Bihar is also attributed to the long list of caste armies or *senas* which are involved in caste mobilizations and carnages every now and then. There are over a dozen large and small caste armies operating in Bihar as referred in Table 9

Table 9. Caste Armies in Bihar- Large and Small

Name	Year of Formation	Caste Affiliation	Area of Operation
1. Kuer Sena	1979	Rajput	Bhojpur
2. Kisan Suraksha Samiti	1979	Kurmi	Patna, Jehanabad, Gaya
3. Bhumi Sena	1983	Kurmi	Patna, Nawada, Nalanda, Jehanabad
4. Lorik Sena	1983	Yadav	Patna, Jehanabad, Nalanda
5. Bramharhi Sena	1984	Bhumihar	Bhojpur, Aurangabad, Jehanabad
6. Kisan Sangh	1984	Rajput, Brahmin	Palamu, Aurangabad
7. Kisan Sewak Samaj	1985	Rajput	Palamu, Aurangabad
8. Sunlight Sena	1989	Pathan, Rajput	Palamu, Garhwa, Aurangabad, Gaya
9. Sawarna Liberation Front	1990	Bhumihar	Gaya, Jehanabad
10. Kisan Morcha	1989-90	Rajput	Bhojpur
11. Ganga Sena	1990	Rajput	Bhojpur
12. Ranvir Sena	1994	Bhumihar	Bhojpur, Patna, Jehanabad, Rohtas, Aurangabad, Gaya
13. Gram Suraksha Parishad	1995	'	Bhojpur
14. Mazdoor Kisan Sangh	1996	'	Bettiah

Source: Louis, Prakash. *“People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar”* New Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002

There's an equally long list of condemnable caste carnages in Bihar carried out by the various upper and oppressed caste armies including MCC, PWG, CPI (ML) in which the men, women and children have lost their life. The details of caste carnages in central Bihar in a chronological order committed by various caste groups against each other is given in Appendix 3.

It's evident from the Table in Appendix 4 that during 1976-2001 out of approximately 70 caste carnages in 46 cases thereof the Forward Castes (mentioned as Upper Caste in the Table) were the perpetrators. In 17 cases the perpetrators belonged to the Backward Castes while in nearly 7 cases the Scheduled Caste political outfits carried out the massacre. It is also noticeable from the various caste carnages listed above that though the mobilization does take place on the basis of caste and is targeted against a particular caste or caste group, nevertheless, the reasons of the violent conflict in most of the cases are largely social or economic. Some important caste carnages can be analyzed to find out the real nature of conflict and to understand the typology of violent caste conflict.

Belchi Carnage

The Belchi massacre of 1977: 14 *Dalit* (Scheduled Castes) farm labourers were killed by the rich OBC Kurmi landlords of Patna district. It was not just a fight over wages but also for a piece of land. Hence, the primary nature of conflict was economic followed by caste based oppression and subjugation. From the social perspective the issues of inequality, exploitation and maltreatment have been the cause of such bloody conflicts. Sinha (1985) in his study of 1977 of the infamous Belchi massacre pointed out the exploitation of the poor and marginalized (castes) by the dominant Kurmi as the major cause of massacre. Sinha (1985) wrote:

“The labourers of Belchi are generally paid one Kilogram of coarse grain per day, though the prevailing rate is three kilograms a day. Those who asked for justice were insulted, abused, and beaten. Those who protested against landlords’ exploitative behavior and resisted their muscle power were implicated into various court cases including murder.” (Sinha, 1985: 90)

The tormentor in this case of carnage had similar feudal traits as far as oppression of the weaker and marginalized castes is concerned. According to the committee constituted by the Bihar Assembly under the Chairmanship of Vijay Kumar Mitra the atrocity committed was an outcome of clash between the oppressor and the oppressed while the immediate cause was the struggle for the demand for better wages by the *Dalit* of the village. However, for the officials of Bihar Government it was the result of a long rivalry between the hardened criminal groups of both the castes. The economic oppression of the weaker

by the stronger though is a class trait but it easily manifests as a caste trait common to all the dominant castes and which can be identified as a dominant caste syndrome.

Parasbigha Carnage

The Parasbigha massacre 1980: In the Jehanabad district *gairmazarua aam*¹⁹ land was traditionally used by the family of Yadav, shepherds and Harijan (The Scheduled Castes) as pastures. A landless Bhumihaar Ram Niranjana Singh came to Parasbigha during pre-independence days and with the help of a local Patwari²⁰ acquired a fake title deed for 35 acres of land in the village which belonged to another Bhumihaar landlord. He had developed considerable clout among his castemen and had a private army of his own too. He later made his claim on the *gairmazarua aam* land as well amidst protest from the Yadav and the Harijans whom he drove out from the land and even destroyed their standing crop. Ram Niranjana Singh was killed in the conflict. To avenge father's death his son Madan Singh, a government employee organized his goons and castemen from the neighbouring villages attacked the Harijans at night, torched their houses and shot at those who tried to flee. This massacre was also among those which were essentially rooted in social and economic oppression but where caste becomes the source of mobilization and thus branded as caste conflict.

Dalelchak Bhagaura Carnage

The Dalelchak Bhagaura massacre 1987: It left 52 Upper Caste men belonging to the Rajput men dead. The perpetrators belonged to the OBC Yadav caste. Those killed were marginal farmers. They were all marginal farmers. It was a mob reported to be 700 strong which committed the carnage and it followed the gunning down of 7 Yadav by the Rajput in the Chechani village. Though the Police attributed the massacre to the ultra-left MCC (Maoist Communist Centre) but many disbelieved it on account of the modus operandi. Nevertheless, its influence among the backward and oppressed castes cannot be ruled out. It also points out the fact that in case of Bihar the Marxist belief of 'class struggle' actually stoops to the level of 'caste struggle' as the members joining these groups bring with them their deep rooted caste prejudices as well. Thus the nature of this massacre was largely social as it reflected the traditional social acrimony between the two castes.

¹⁹ A term used in the Zamindari (feudal) system in Bihar to define a common plot of land for cattle grazing.

²⁰ A low ranking official who keeps record of the land measurement and ownership

Lakshmanpur-Bathe Carnage

The Lakshmanpur-Bathe massacre 1997: The massacre carried out by the Bhumihar dominated Ranbir Sena left 58 landless Scheduled Caste men-women and children dead belonging to the Chamar, Mahto, Mallah, Paswan and Rajwar caste. They were supposed to be the supporters of the ultra-left CPI (ML) Party Unity. As reported by Chaudhuri in Frontline (December 13-26, 1997) the immediate cause was:

“The dispute between local landlords and landless peasants over 60 acres of land is said to be the cause of the carnage. Bhumihar reportedly captured 50 acres of village land earmarked for distribution among the landless peasants in the village. They also grabbed 10 acres of *garmazuarua* (government) land that was distributed among the landless peasants with *purchas* (land ownership documents). A section of peasants affiliated to naxalite groups was up in arms against upper-caste landlords of the Bhumihar community.” (Chaudhuri, December 13-26, 1997)

The violence in Bathe was once again an example of caste mobilization for maintaining economic hegemony and depriving the landless oppressed Scheduled Castes to earn their livelihood leading to a conflict between the haves and have-nots which was underscored and exploited by the leftist political ideology. But as mentioned above, the class conflict again manifested into caste conflict as it polarized on caste lines.

Senari Carnage

The Senari massacre 1999: In the Jehanabad district the massacre left 35 Upper Caste Bhumihar dead which was perpetrated by the oppressed Scheduled Castes dominated by left outfit MCC (Maoist Communist Centre). Baweja and Jha reported in India Today (April 5, 1999) that “Politics, casteism and deprivation have made Jehanabad fertile armies of the landed and the landless.” According to them the Home Secretary of Bihar looked at it as a struggle for power. The Bhumihar had to say that despite giving the *Dalit* shelter and 3 kg rice to eat they don’t want to work and they wore slippers and walked past their home without lowering their heads. The *Dalit* on the other hand are quoted saying in the report that they had to sell their land only because they were poor and they don’t pay because they’re poor. The Senari massacre was though not a result of direct confrontation between the *Dalit* and Upper Caste Bhumihar of the village but the statement issued by the MCC was laced with political icing. MCC Central Zone

Committee Secretary Badal declined that the Senari victims were innocent and accused them of being sympathizers of Ranbir Sena. Using Marxist political terminology Badal called them reactionaries and staunch supporters of the Ranbir Sena who were giving shelter to the Sena killers and helping them financially too. He warned the Upper Caste Bhumihar to dissociate from the Sena or face a fate similar to Senari. Badal also called Sena's operations against the oppressed castes as 'anti-people'.

The Jehanabad district of central Bihar remained the killing field of caste violence and saw a series of retaliatory massacres by the Upper Caste army mainly the Ranbir Sena and the army of the oppressed castes - the MCC cadres which enjoyed support of both the Backward and the Scheduled Castes. The retaliation of Senari massacre by the MCC cadres was another round of killing at Mianpur village on June 15, 2000 by Ranbir Sena in which 35 Backward Caste Yadav and Scheduled Caste men were killed. Those killed were branded as MCC sympathizers by the Ranbir Sena.

Once again, the killer army came from another village and none of them belonged to the Mianpur village. Sinha, Kantha and Das (2000) in their report of Bihar PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberty) on the killings at Rajebigha (June 3, 2000), Apsarh (June 11, 2000) and Mianpur (June 15, 2000) pointed out that no matter whether one is a relatively better off *kisan* (farmer) belonging to the Bhumihar community, a poor *Dalit* farm labourer, or a Yadav making his living with difficulty, anyone could become a target without any reason. They also point out yet another important aspect that usually there are no violent clashes even as rival armed groups are operating in different parts of the State. According to Sinha, Kantha and Das (2000):

"More often than not, it is the unarmed, and sometimes the unsuspecting, common person who is likely to be butchered in one of these massacres, where the counting of numbers is the prime consideration. Massacres are not news any longer, but the recent spate of killings pushes the situation to a further low point. Sometimes an observer from outside may have an eerie feeling that unless prevented, things may move inexorably in the direction of generalized caste clashes." (Sinha, Kantha and Das, 2000)

Rajebigha Carnage

Rajebigha carnage left 5 Yadav dead while the subsequent Apsarh carnage left 12 members of the Bhumihaar community dead. So vitiated was the atmosphere that while Laloo Yadav and the then CM Bihar Rabri Devi avoided visiting Apsarh where the victims were the members of the Bhumihaar community, Dr. CP Thakur an MP belonging to the Bhumihaar community didn't visit Rajebigha where Yadav were the casualty. Certainly these series of violence were certainly not an immediate outcome of any economic conflict but a mere perpetuation of caste hatred and mistrust due to the endemic violent conflicts between different castes. The political opportunism and deceit and its reflection on administrative machinery compounded the problem. So what began as a conflict between economic oppression versus economic interest got converted into a caste war which many apprehended as the beginning of a civil war. The economic nature of class conflict acquired a social nature of caste conflict. The indiscriminate killings of innocent men of a particular caste or caste groups by totally unknown persons of a different caste or caste groups reflected the burgeoning caste hatred at the social level. In several cases massacres were executed to avenge the killing of somebody and the victims were selected on the basis of kinship relation.

The Causes of Carnage

In most caste carnages, one finds that while the root causes of the conflicts are essentially economic and social, they acquire political overtone and ideology. The ideological bases of the conflict are divergent. While the justification for the creation of the various Senas (caste armies) lies in the harassment caused to the middle level farmers by the Naxalite and the failure of the state to safeguard their interest, the Naxals point out to the social and economic exploitation of the oppressed castes and the labourers by the Upper Caste farmers.

In the ongoing caste conflict now nobody is typically an oppressor or an oppressed as both have acquired similar traits of brutality. Cases of social and economic exploitation are still prevalent but to a much reduced degree. Sinha, Kantha and Das (2000) have made a very pertinent observation with regard to caste conflict which sums it up rather fairly as they write in the Bihar People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) Report:

“It has been a common complaint of *Dalit* youths that of they keeping sitting on cots in front of their homes when some of the

dominant persons, especially youths from upper caste are simply passing by, it could invite their wrath. Even today there are cases galore when several indignities are heaped upon male and female members of the *Dalit* community. It is true that both economic and social exploitation has perceptibly declined in general, but a late phenomenon has been a reassertion of dominance in pockets where they become strong. ...The accusations made by both sides are exaggerated, even if there may be varying degrees of truth in them. In the accepted and constitutionally sanctified frame of rights and the general promise of democracy the grievances of the lower sections of the society may be more genuine and correct, but the manner of dealing with the situation may sometimes create grater disharmony in the society and possible violence.” (Sinha, Kantha and Das, 2000: 4)

Bihar went through a terrible phase of caste violence which kept Bihar bleeding for over two decades. It reached its crescendo with the formation of Ranbir Sena in 1994 and its violent clashes with the MCC which became issueless and purely revengeful and retaliatory. None of the warring sides stood to gain anything from this mindless series of violence. Nevertheless, the point it proved beyond any doubt was the rising social and political awareness among the oppressed Scheduled Castes and the possibility of their coming together to assert for their right, dignity and share in governance.

The social dimensions of caste conflict are vast and varied. The reason may be attributed to caste being a social construct created and used to serve different purposes from social stratification to hierarchy, identity, dominance and status. The economic and political dimensions of caste conflict also evolve first at the social plain. The social and economic deprivation drew political attention and later with the provisions of universal adult franchise in place caste discrimination became a practical political obsession as well, too difficult to ignore. The need to ensure ‘social justice’ to the weaker sections of the society is also felt due to the presence of ‘social injustice’ at a large scale. It’s therefore necessary to understand the social dimensions and bases of caste conflict to appreciate the economic and political dimensions.

ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF CASTE CONFLICT

In the larger perspective of social conflict, social class is a much wider concept than caste. But caste and economic status are often complimentary in nature; in other words, higher the position of a caste in the traditional hierarchy greater the chances of its being economically better off. Similarly, lower the position of a caste in the social hierarchy, greater are the chances of its economic deprivation. In the changing socio-political scenario and the emerging economic opportunities, this may not strictly follow as a rule, but it does follow as a pattern.

Notwithstanding the fact that oppression is the trait of the dominant class irrespective of caste, in Bihar caste and class often seem to be inseparable in case of oppression and ensuing caste conflict. Not only that, even among the dominant castes there's a large number of people who are weak and thus oppressed and marginalized by their own caste members and others. But the polarization of the weak and marginalized as an 'oppressed class' to fight against oppression and injustice irrespective of their caste affiliation has rarely taken place in Bihar.

During the last decade of the twentieth century when caste conflict in rural Bihar was at its peak, the ultra-left organization MCC which ostensibly was set up to counter the oppression of the 'feudal class' had negligible support even among the poor and marginalized members of the Upper Castes. Its conflict with the so called 'feudal class' was in reality a mindless spate of caste violence aimed against the Upper Castes in general and a specific caste in particular. This strange 'class conflict' didn't even spare the weak and oppressed among the Upper Castes. Skewed landholding pattern had been one of the foremost reasons of caste conflict and organized caste violence perpetrated by different caste armies in Bihar.

Large landholding was the reminiscence of the feudal era in the politically changing society of Bihar. The rising political consciousness and the emergence of the marginalized and landless castes under the influence of the leftist ideology became a restless and potent force which challenged the feudal Upper Castes' hegemony over traditional landholding. In other words, the feudal castes were constantly facing the

threat in the wake of the rise of leftist ideology. The conflict was imminent. The survey data also indicated that the causes of violent land conflict in the state were not due to caste or economic hegemony or insecurity among the Upper Castes as much as the conflict between the feudal and leftist ideology. The majority 37.1% respondents held this view. (Annexure 17)

In Bihar, the conflict over the right and use of the scarce resources due to skewed land and ownership ratio may theoretically be explained in accordance with the Marxist dogma of 'class conflict' between the 'have and have-nots' but its manifestation has remained essentially caste based. It's in this context that an attempt has been made to analyze the economic dimension of Bihar's caste conflict.

Poor Economic Planning and Performance

The economic dimension of caste conflict is rather insular and mainly concerned with monopolizing the sources of income generation and inequitable distribution of wealth. However, it is not completely devoid of the social and political dimensions of dominance. Srinivas (1959) in his discussion on power and dominance in terms of 'dominant caste' in Indian villages pointed out four notable aspects of dominance which included numerical, economic and political strength, ritual status, western education and occupation. These are shared by different castes in different proportion and those who have most of it, enjoy the status of dominance.

The economic dimension thus also figures prominently in the discussion of caste conflict and plays a major role. The economic conflict had an obvious social dimension whereby certain castes or group of castes were socially assigned to perform only a certain type of economic activity according to their caste occupation and were debarred from taking up occupation of their choice though which were economically rewarding. However, the Constitution of independent India guarantees 'Right to Occupation' as a Fundamental Right and subsequently the policy of job reservation for the weaker and marginalized sections of the society ensures access to jobs and professions hitherto considered a bastion of the Upper Castes.

One of the reasons for caste conflict due to the economic factors in Bihar may also be attributed to the fact that in the post-Independence India, the economic frontier of caste has gone for a mutation and more and more castes are unshackling their traditional

restriction of occupation. Sachchidananda (1988) maintained that in a 'casteless society' conflict or clash of interest is limited among individuals, but in a caste society, it leads to caste conflict. Further, it's the political conflict which accentuates the economic conflict. The democratization of the political system, decentralization of power by strengthening Panchayati Raj and universal adult franchise have empowered the citizens and introduced political consciousness among them. This has helped caste groups emerge as a politico-economic pressure group conscious and aware of its rightful claim over the means of production and income generation [Sachchidananda, 1988: 10-11]. Bihar primarily being an agrarian society, skewed landholding has been a major source of conflict. Since a major portion of the population depends on agriculture and its allied activities with no other source of income generation, exploitation of all sorts physical, social, economic have been common.

In order to understand the economic dimension leading of caste conflict in Bihar it is essential to look at the macro-economy and the economic performance of the state over the years. The process of economic reforms which were set in motion during the 1990's, accelerated the GDP of the nation from a meager 5.6% in 1990-91 to its highest ever 9.6% in 2006 and helped many states experience unprecedented economic growth. Table 10 indicates the comparative rate of economic growth in some of the major Indian states during the period of over two decades spanning from 1980-2004.

Table 10. Comparative Rate of Economic Growth in Major Indian States, 1980-2004

States	1980-1990	1990-2004	1980-2004
Andhra Pradesh	4.81	5.33	5.1
Assam	3.91	3.00	3.4
Bihar	5.20	4.2	4.6
Gujarat	5.71	8.11	7.1
Haryana	6.68	6.63	6.65
Himachal Pradesh	6.10	6.44	6.3
Karnataka	6.10	6.38	6.3
Kerala	4.50	5.69	5.2
Madhya Pradesh	5.18	4.74	4.9
Maharashtra	5.98	5.92	5.95
Orissa	5.85	3.94	4.7
Punjab	5.14	4.14	4.6
Rajasthan	7.17	5.68	6.3
Tamil Nadu	6.35	5.70	5.97
Uttar Pradesh	5.88	3.76	4.64
West Bengal	5.20	7.12	6.32
All-India	5.60	5.90	5.8

Data Source: Kohli, Atul. "Politics of Economic Growth in India, 1980-2005 Part II: The 1990s and Beyond"

During 1990-2004 while states like Gujarat, West Bengal and Haryana were recording much higher rate of economic growth, Bihar's economic growth during the same period was just 4.2%. No doubt the period also saw the division of Bihar and the separation of the industrial backbone of the state in the form of Jharkhand. But even during the earlier decade of 1980-1990 its economic growth of 5.20% was not comparable to the best in the country. The investment climate in the states also saw a decline in Bihar. Several factors inherent with Bihar's outlook towards managing political economy were responsible for the slow track of economic development over a period of time. The

factors included the lack of political vision to implement social justice through economic growth, lack of initiative to convert the agrarian economy into industrial economy, absence of infrastructure to encourage domestic and foreign investment and climate to support entrepreneurship. The Economic Survey of Bihar 2011 stated the GDP of the state at a miraculous 11.0% which covered a long way from a negative 5.15% during 2003-04 and presented Bihar as India's new miracle economy. This made Bihar the state just next to Gujarat having the highest 11.5% GDP during the same period. However, such miraculous performance not only became a matter of great debate but great scepticism too. The reason for such scepticism was largely due to the fact that Bihar had always been deprived of proper economic vision and planning. During the social justice regime of Laloo Yadav economic agenda and priorities of the state had been all time low. Nitish Kumar inherited an economy which was in a terrible state. In such a situation the quantum jump from the negative to positive rate of growth in a short span of five years is sure to raise eyebrows.

The survey data also corroborated that the lack of industrial policy and political will has been the cause of Bihar's laggard economic performance over the years. As much as 43.3% respondents among all caste categories felt that to be the reason which was endorsed by SCs 43.9%, OBCs 37.5% and UCs 51.9%. The same was also held by respondents affiliated to INC 51.9%, BJP 33.9%, RJD 40% and JDU 40%. Not only this, the respondents across caste groups and political affiliation found the lack of economic resources and infrastructure a more important issue than the issue of caste violence and conflict. (Annexure 18)

The World Bank in its 2003 report observed that a wide range of fiscal pressure including the need to serve the populist policy by the underperforming state became an important reason for the visible deceleration in the economic growth. As a result, the decline in public investment from 15-20% during 1980s came crashing to 5-10% in the post reform period of 1990s [World Bank Report, 2003, Chapter 3]. Kohli (2006) observed that it was also the case that repeated governments in Bihar had simply not been developmental. Consumed by the need to broaden and maintain their electoral power, the priorities of Bihar's political leadership are anything but growth promotion [Kohli, 2006: 1367]. The irony of the situation is that prior to economic liberalization Bihar's economic growth was 5.2% while the same dropped to 4.2% in the post-

liberalization era of 1990s. It surely reflects on the political vision and priority of the then government.

World Bank in its report of 2005 observed “Bihar has not been proactive in courting private investment or articulating a development strategy and “vision.” Thus, the government does not have an investment council, conveying a lack of concern about fostering and protecting private investment” [Bihar Towards a Development Strategy, World Bank 2005: 32]. As estimated by World Bank (2005) nearly 40% of the state population lives below poverty line (BPL) and the alleviation of poverty would require a multi-pronged approach.

Rural poverty incidence is 41.1% while the same in the urban areas is close to 24.7%. Rural poverty is further worsened by limited access to land resources, livestock, poor health, illiteracy and rewarding occupations. Following the bifurcation of Bihar, 90% of its population lives in rural areas. The industrial urban centres went to Jharkhand and the state was left mainly with agriculture as its economic backbone. In the post-independence era Bihar emerged as a major industrialized state in terms of the establishment of large scale public sector industries which withered away over a period of time.

The undivided Bihar’s Chotanagpur plateau which was the most mineral rich belt and its proximity to Calcutta²¹ the important industrial centre of Eastern India became the *raison d’être* for the establishment of heavy industries in places like Ranchi (the present capital of Jharkhand), Jamshedpur, Bokaro, Dhanbad and so on. These places turned into industrial cities in course of time. As against that, the northern part of Bihar which supplemented the overall wealth of the state with its sound agricultural economy didn’t see any parallel industrialization which was possible in the field of agro-industry.

The obvious reason for the lack of development of the agro-industries on the Gangetic plains of Bihar was the focus on investment in heavy industries. The overall result of this lopsided economic development and industrialization was that it caused regional economic imbalance and the wealth generated through the mines, iron, steel, fertilizer, heavy engineering industries didn’t reach North-Bihar. It didn’t even see growth of parallel service industry to support these heavy industries of South Bihar.

²¹ Now called Kolkata

According to the Economic Survey of Bihar (2008-09) the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) at current prices for the present Bihar in 2007-08 was Rs. 94,489 crore. The contribution of manufacturing sector in this accounted for only Rs. 4,664 crore which is a meager 5.16%. The agro-based industries including textiles, leather, wood and paper accounted for nearly 43% of the gross value added. Bihar constitutes a meager 0.48% of the total production of agro-based industries at the all-India level. There're only 263 medium and large scale industries in Bihar, while as on December 2008 there were 1,74,278 small industries registered in the state. They comprise of 1502 small scale units, 1,02,676 tiny units and 70,100 artisan-based units. The Survey estimates total investment in these units to be in the tune of Rs. 1,017.62 crore which provides employment to 5.68 lakh workers.

Bihar's disadvantaged economy suffers from its comparatively lower growth rate on the one hand and at the same time with considerable year-to-year variation in growth rates as well. One of the most significant sources of variation is its economic backbone agricultural itself. Besides that many other sectors of its economy too are not free from this structural weakness. For the agricultural sector, annual occurrence of flood and the degree of its devastation determine the productivity of agriculture. As much as 73.06% of the State's area which is 68,800 sq. km is flood prone and has recorded highest occurrence of flood in the last 30 years.

The State Net Domestic Product (NSDP) of Bihar in comparison to other states is also not impressive. The Survey puts the medium term growth rate of Bihar's NSDP at constant prices, covering period 1999-00 to 2008-09, at an estimated 5.57%. This growth rate is lower than the national growth rate of about 6-7%, nevertheless, it indicates an improved growth performance compared to the recent past when the state economy had managed to grow at barely 3-4%. At the current population growth rate of about 1.96% for Bihar, the per capita NSDP in Bihar has grown to 3.61%. The comparative position of Bihar vis a vis other states given in Table 11 shows that in 2005-06 whereas the per capita NSDP for the whole India at current prices stood at Rs. 25,716/ its figure for Bihar was Rs. 7,875/ which was hardly 30.6% of the national average. At the same time, it's also the lowest in the country among all major states.

Table 11. Per Capita Net State Domestic Product at Current Prices for Major Indian States 1999-2006 (In Rupees)

State	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
Andhra Pradesh	15507	17243	18630	19568	22041	23729	26211
Assam	12269	12797	13153	14600	15687	16825	18598
Bihar	5766	6396	6197	6928	6913	7464	7875
Chhattisgarh	11761	10985	12443	13145	16098	18068	20151
Gujarat	18864	18392	19823	22683	26922	29468	34157
Haryana	21966	24138	26077	28259	31509	35044	38832
Himachal Pradesh	20806	22795	24608	26627	28333	31140	33805
Jharkhand	12747	10294	10972	11865	12941	17493	19066
Karnataka	16758	17464	17776	19041	20515	24199	27291
Kerala	19294	19917	21047	23207	25645	27864	30668
Madhya Pradesh	12384	11862	12697	12303	14306	14534	15647
Maharashtra	23340	22992	24450	26697	29770	32979	37081
Orissa	10567	10452	11075	11788	14252	16306	17299
Punjab	25615	27863	28949	29443	31192	32945	34929
Rajasthan	13477	12897	14165	13126	16704	16800	17863
Tamil Nadu	19378	20927	20924	21813	24106	27137	29958
Uttar Pradesh	9405	9541	9781	10435	11250	11941	13262
West Bengal	15826	16521	17826	18746	20806	22522	25223
India	15839	16648	17800	18899	20936	22946	25716

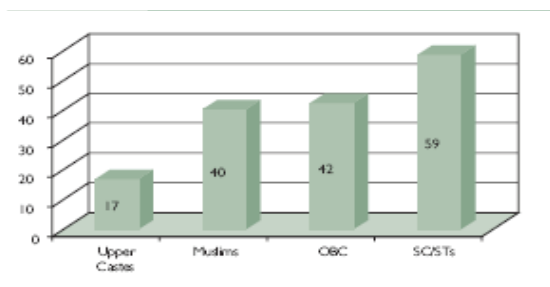
Data Source: Economic Survey 2008-09, Government of Bihar

Poverty and Caste Identity

Studies on Bihar's political discourse have revealed that the issues of State's poverty are also closely linked to individual's social status and caste identity. The traditional oppression and marginalization of the weaker castes commonly identified as OBCs and SCs by the dominant Upper Castes kept them deprived of the right to choose their profession and their access to other economic opportunities. The poor are thus generally identified as low caste (read oppressed and Backward Castes), lowly paid off the bottom status and illiterate. They live in ill-kept houses amidst lack of basic facilities such as safe

drinking water, sanitation and so on. It's noteworthy that despite several decades of efforts and welfare policies for the socio-economic upliftment of the Scheduled Castes, they are still almost three times as poor in comparison to the Upper Castes as and considerably poorer than the OBCs in Bihar. The SCs per capita expenditure on household and landholding are very small in comparison to the Upper and Backward Castes. Chart 4 depicts the rural poverty among the caste groups in Bihar during 1999-2000.

Chart-4 Rural Poverty among Social Groups in Bihar 1999-2000



Source: Bihar Towards a Development Strategy, World Bank 2005

The Skewed Landholding in Bihar

The total geographical area of Bihar according to Government of Bihar official portal Bihar Online is about 93.60 lakh hectare. Out of this only 56.38 lakh hectare is the net cultivated area while the gross cultivated area is 79.46 lakh hectares (Bihar Online 2008). According to Government of Bihar data on Sectoral Distribution of GSDP (2003-04) 40% of the state economy is agriculture based as against national 20%. Industry contributes 10% of GSDP in Bihar as against the national 30%. The remaining 50% is contributed by service sector which is same as to the national figure. The agricultural sector employs close to 75% of the state population either as cultivators or agricultural labourer. The marginal landholdings²² are far greater as compared to their corresponding national figure as per the report of the Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture (1995-96). In Bihar 80.14% landholding is marginal which is less than 1.00 hectare, whereas the national figure is 61.58%. In Bihar the average size of marginal landholding is approximately 0.34 hectare again less than the national average of .04 hectare. The overall national landholding size is estimated to be 1.41hectare whereas it's

²² Marginal landholding means less than 1 hectare of landholding

just 0.75 hectare in Bihar. The 55th round of NSSO Survey conducted in the year 1999-2000 estimates 76.6% of all agricultural labourer in the state as completely landless²³ which is a major cause of economic conflict in the state.

There is a caste angle to the skewed relationship between land and landholding in Bihar. Historically before independence of India the major portion of land was held by Upper Caste landlords followed by the OBCs while the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes remained largely landless. The 'Abolition of *Zamindari* Act' was modified several times as Agricultural Land (Ceiling and Management) Act popularly known as Land Ceiling Act in the year 1955 and was further revised in 1971 and 1973 with no great positive effect. But due to the resistance from the influential upper caste landholders who also mattered politically those days. As per the Act a 'person' was entitled to nearly 55 acres of land including land for homestead and fodder cultivation. However, the Act was further revised in 1971 and 1973 and the right of landholding was transferred to the 'family' rather than 'person' and the ceiling was fixed at 45 acres per 'family'.

Ekta Prishad in an in-depth comprehensive analysis of landholding carried out during 2007 in four districts of Bihar found that nearly 88.7% of the landholders under the area of study were marginal. The maximum percentage of marginal landholders belonged to the SCs and STs which was 95.1% and 92.6% respectively whereas OBCs, Muslims and Upper Castes figure was 88.1%, 82.7% and 77.7% respectively [Ekta Parishad and PRAXIS, 2009: 11-12]. Table 12 gives a breakup of the proportion of marginal landholding among the three caste groups in four districts of Bihar.

²³ Landless means people owning less than 0.4 hectares of land

Table 12. Proportion of Marginal Landholders in Different Caste-Groups in Four Districts of Bihar

Proportion of households with marginal landholding (less than 1.00 hectare)	Nawada	Jamui	Gaya	West Champaran
Scheduled Caste	0.95	0.95	0.86	1.00
Scheduled Tribes	—	0.97	—	0.92
Other Backward Classes	0.92	0.88	0.80	0.82
Muslims	0.82	0.84	1.00	0.00
Other Castes	0.87	0.71	0.42	0.42
Total	0.92	0.88	0.83	0.86

Data Source: Ekta Parishad and PRAXIS, Landless and Social Justice an Assessment of Disparities in Land Distribution and Prospects of Land Reform, 2009

High incidence of marginal landholding which cuts across all the three caste groups as evident from the sample of the four districts shown in Table 8.3 is disquieting. This shows an endemic nature of economic deprivation in the state which is attributed to caste oppression rather than structural weakness. Ekta Parishad and PRAXIS also highlighted an equally high incidence of virtually landless households as shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Proportion of Virtually Landless Households amongst Different Caste-Groups in Four Districts of Bihar

Proportion of Virtually Landless Households (owning less than 0.4 hectares of land)	Nawada	Jamui	Gaya	West Champaran
Scheduled Caste	0.89	0.75	0.70	0.96
Scheduled Tribes	—	0.88	—	0.80
Other Backward Classes	0.79	0.67	0.59	0.64
Muslims	0.70	0.65	0.67	0.00
Other Castes	0.72	0.58	0.42	0.26
Total	0.80	0.70	0.64	0.73

Data Source: Ekta Parishad and PRAXIS, Landless and Social Justice an Assessment of Disparities in Land Distribution and Prospects of Land Reform, 2009.

The findings of Tables 8.3 and 8.4 are comparable with the figures of Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture, which pegs the marginal landholding in Bihar to 80.14%.

Economic Impoverishment and Class-Caste Conflict

In many economically backward states, poverty and conflict have largely a two-way relationship wherein poverty is both a cause and consequence of conflict [Mohanty, 2007: 1]. Bihar is trapped into that maze. In the rural Bihar, which has experienced worst kind of caste conflicts the economic issues have always been that of land ownership, wages and economic exploitations of various sorts. In parts of central Bihar, caste conflicts have led to organized massacres of the marginalized peasants and landless labourers by middle and Upper Caste landed ‘armies’ and retaliatory action by the ultra-leftist Marxist-Leninist organizations. During the *Zamindari* days before independence the instruments of oppression known as the *lathait* (lathi wielding henchmen) were sorts of mercenary who were paid by the landlords to execute their

orders. In the present day caste armies and the Marxist-Leninist organizations are completely voluntary and influenced by caste considerations and affiliations.

Chakravarty (2001) observed that the economic aspect of caste conflict has a direct relation with the 'agrarian class structure' which refers to the arrangement of groups (or classes) which are determined by access or denial thereof to land- the primary means of production. The relationship of one class with another is also determined by the differential access to land and other means of production. In case of Bihar this agrarian class relation is embedded in caste, because whether a person controls land or not is conditioned by that person's caste status [Chakravarty: 2001: 1449]. Castes as group often enjoy antagonistic relationship over the means of production due to traditional hierarchy and oppression. Under the Marxian scheme of things antagonistic classes under the capitalist system of economy are marked with class struggle against the bourgeoisie. This idea has been the main driving force behind the oppressed castes coming together as 'oppressed class' and fight back under the political umbrella of the ultra-leftist organizations like CPI(ML) in Bihar. The oppressed class or the social underclass becomes the change agent as per the Marxian social doctrine and lead to emancipation.

Agrarian Uprise

Bihar has a long history of sporadic agrarian uprise of both violent and non-violent nature against economic suppression and exploitation. Among the tribals, it experienced the Santhal revolt of 1885-86 and the Munda uprise of 1886-1887. Later on, there was unrest in Champaran against the colonial exploitation of the native indigo planters which was later given the leadership by Gandhiji in 1917 under Champaran Satyagraha. Swami Sahajanand's Kisan Sabha initiated the movement against the abolition of the exploitative *Zamindari* system during the 1930s and two of its most famous movements were the Bakshat movement of 1936-38, Rewra movement in Gaya during 1933 and 1938 besides others.

The movement that Kisan Sabha led during the 1930s though eventually culminated into the abolition of the *Zamindari* system in Bihar right after independence, but as a social movement it remained confined among the rich large and middle farmers than among the marginalized poor. The biggest failure of the Kisan Sabha was on account of its inability to give leadership to this social underclass. The Communists and the Socialists

in Bihar tried to champion the cause of the social underclass in an organized political manner during 1950s and 1960s. The Communists whose fundamental ideological postulate is based on Marxian class struggle didn't indulge into any violent struggle at that time. That approach might not have even worked at that time as the impact of Gandhian non-violent mass mobilization for bringing about social and political change had a deep influence on the social psyche.

However, towards the end of the decade of 1960s the simmering discontent was exploited by the ultra-Leftist organization CPI (ML) which was formed in 1969 and gradually the Leftist Naxalite gave the 'class struggle' a violent dimension. The biggest contribution of the Left groups, if any, was to challenge the social and economic hegemony of the dominant castes by preaching the Marxist-Leninist and also the Maoist political thoughts and ideologies. Prasad (1995) in the context of Bihar's caste *Senas* (armies) observed:

“the radical assertion of the poor peasants, sharecroppers and landless agricultural labourers, has posed formidable challenge to the hegemonic position and *status quoist* ideology of the landed gentry in the central plain. Dominant caste(s) made a battle cry, ‘the *kisans*’ lives and property are in danger, and the government has failed miserably in protecting them; so the Kisan must themselves protect their lives and property....The growing radicalism in agrarian structure of central Bihar forced the landed elite to mobilize their fellow caste men which resulted into the formation of various *Senas*.” (Prasad, 1995: 5)

The traditional caste system in Bihar as elsewhere in India was also based on the *Jajmani* system. Under this system, the landlords or the *Zamindars* generally the Upper Caste would be the employer, exploiter and more often than not, the tormentor too of their *ryot* or service providers who belonged to the lower castes and lower economic strata. The conflicts at various times beginning from the decade of 1970s involved the Upper Castes and the Scheduled Castes and in some cases the OBCs too. The dichotomy exists between the Marxists and casteist perspective of looking at the conflict. What is class struggle for one is caste struggle for the other. Many political journalists like Arun Sinha who initially looked at the conflicts as caste conflict after

some time were more inclined to look at the same as 'class war' between the handful of 'landlords' and the multitude of 'landless' [Sinha, 1977: 2037].

The conflicts which took place among different caste-groups at Kargahar, Pathadda, Gopalpur and Dharampura in Bihar were basically economic in nature. The labourers, most of whom belonged to the weaker and oppressed castes were asserting for certain legal rights fair wages, occupancy rights and freedom from bondage. In the later phase of the caste conflict in Bihar during the 1990s the uprising against the Upper Caste landlord socio-economic oppression by the organized Naxalite CPI(ML), Party Unity (PU) cadres left many Upper Caste men dead at Jalpura in 1997, Senari and in Jehanabad in 1999.

In several cases of caste conflict in Bihar the cause of conflict has either been the demand for higher wages or landholding rights such as in Belchi and Kargha in Patna and Jehanabad districts in 1977. The violence and atrocity against the Scheduled Castes were perpetrated by the upper Backward Castes. Those who killed belonged to the Backward 'Kurmi' caste. The Kurmi emerged as the new owners of land in the seventies and were pitted against landless labour *Dalit*. The fight was not just over wages but also a piece of land and thus essentially economic in nature. According to Janaki Paswan, one of the survivors of Belchi the Kurmi wanted to capture a piece of land that belonged to the *Dalit*. Belchi massacre of 1977 set into motion a series of violent conflicts which rocked Bihar for the next two decades leading to widespread social tension and killings.

It was almost always a conflict between the dominant castes (no matter whether Upper or Backward) versus the weaker sections, who began to group together under the Naxals. Yadav's (2006) report on the 2006 Raghapur massacre which involved conflict over a piece of land between Jagat Rai a Yadav and Vijyendra Mahto, a Kahar further substantiates the fact. It was this piece of five katha²⁴ land which Jagat Rai's ancestors had given to the ancestors of Vijeyandra Mahto nearly hundred years ago. Jagat Rai wanted to reclaim the land which by now was allotted to Mahto by the government. Despite court's order Jagat Rai forcibly occupied the land and to teach the poor Kahar a lesson stole his buffalo the only source of his economic sustenance. Mahto dared lodge a Police complaint which caused Rai's arrest and later led to the massacre of the poor

²⁴ Katha is a traditional method of land measurement prevalent in Bihar and in some other states. 1 Katha is equal to 720sq.ft.

Kahar family of six by burning them alive on the very first day of 2006. In this case both the dominant caste angle and the economic angle were involved in equal measure.

Yadav (2006) reported that the Yadav as a caste received tremendous psychological empowerment which was apparent in Raghopur, where they outnumbered other castes. The fact that the area is represented by Rabri Devi Bihar's ex- Chief Minister emboldened the Yadav to use their might and muscle on weaker sections. Yadav (2006) further explained that: "Of the many ills plaguing Bihar, feudalism — or neo-feudalism — forms the core. Any caste group, empowered through ownership of land and/or political power, inevitably acquires this trait. It wants to use its position of strength to suppress the weaker sections" [Yadav, 2006]. It's this tendency which made economic exploitation of the weaker sections a 'class syndrome' and all the castes which became dominant acquired this trait.

Caste-Class Conflict

The economic conflict at the grassroot level in Bihar is marked with a caste-class character where castes driven by common interest come together either as oppressor or as rebels. The coming together starts the formation of a social class either of the dominant or that of the oppressed. The class-caste division precipitated after the Green Revolution in the 1960s brought fortune to a group of landholding castes both among the Backward and the Upper Castes while left the marginalized castes, mostly the *Dalit* even more deprived. The economic impact of the Green Revolution also considerably empowered the intermediary landholding castes such as the Kurmi, the Koeri and the Yadav as well politically and the two-pronged oppression of the *Dalit* and the Extremely Backward Castes saw a rise in caste conflict.

Another important aspect of the economic conflict is also related to the status-quo mindset of the land owning class who despite the fact that the land by and large is quite fertile do not want to invest in the modern techniques to get higher yield. Hence, the demand for higher wages often ends up in caste conflict and violence. Chaudhary (1988) reported several types of conflict in Bihar's caste-class structure between i) big landlords versus tenant cultivators ii) owner-cultivators versus moneylenders who come to own land once mortgaged with them by the former and iii) landless poor peasants versus landlords and owner cultivators [Chaudhary, 1988: 51]. In the rural power structure, the landlords and the moneylenders comprise of the group whose dominance can be felt both economically

and socio-politically. Often they directly control the economic interest of the landless poor peasants.

There's assertion by the oppressed castes not only against economic exploitation but also for bringing change in the existing power structure which is at the root of exploitation. In Bihar, due to the lack of other sources of sustainable economic opportunities an overwhelming percentage of population still depends on agriculture for livelihood. Here too it's the caste-class factor which defines the level or kind of dependence people would have on this source of economic sustenance.

For agriculture, land is the main capital but due to the traditionally skewed relationship between land ownership and caste a large section of landless or agriculture labourers are the subject of exploitation. Relatively higher incidences of economic oppression and the ensuing caste conflict are experienced in Bihar because the micro-economy of the state which doesn't provide enough opportunity of employment outside this sector. Since the membership of caste is not a subject to option but birth, it's all the more difficult to break this caste-class restriction in terms of economic option as well. A landless caste thus remains landless and subject to economic exploitation till it assertively and consciously opts out for other professions for economic sustenance. No doubt, the growing political awareness and social consciousness are changing the ground realities in some small yet perceptible measure as many castes are opting out for other means of livelihood within and mostly outside the state.

Emergence of the Neo-Landlords

The new political and economic realities are also changing the nature of the fight for economic dominance and hegemony. The abolition of *Zamindari* made many intermediary castes or the OBC such as the Yadav, the Koeri, the Kurmi, the Kahar, the Kanu among others, emerge as the neo-landholders who until sometimes ago used to be the *ryots* of the big and upper caste landlords. Many of them have also supplemented their agricultural income with service and thus became from marginal to big landlords by buying the lands of the traditional landlords, mostly upper caste men. This was evident in Patna and its adjoining districts which saw series of caste conflicts. Soon they became politically ambitious and powerful and their treatment to the poor landless labourers became as ruthless as that of any Upper Caste landlord.

Government and Bhoodan Efforts

Though the Government of Bihar made efforts for land reform from time to time albeit half-heartedly, it was also supported by the Bhoodan movement of Vinoba Bhave in Bihar in which the big landlords were appealed and encouraged to donate their surplus land to the landless. It was an effort well made but yielded rather unimpressive result due to the dishonesty and insecurity of the donors who though on papers made generous contribution but in reality in many cases turned out to be a hoax. The landless were often the Scheduled Castes who constantly lived under the fear and suspicion that the land given to them may someday taken away by the donors as many of them never got the title of the land transferred in their name. In the Dangra village of the Gaya district for example the *Dalit* belonging to the Bhuyan caste constantly lived under the fear of being deprived of their possession someday. They had reasons to feel so as in some cases after the death of the donor the members of his family forced the recipient to surrender the possession to them. The argument was that because the person who donated the land was dead and so the donation also automatically stands cancelled.

In some cases, like the one in Rajuli in Nawada district the donor's son demanded the donated piece of land from the recipient after ten years on the pretext that when the land was donated his father had enough property and now since they're left with little land they want to take it back. In yet another case in Gaya district after the death of the recipient the donated land was reclaimed from his descendants on the pretext that they did not own the right to inherit the donated land. The Bhoodan movement thus also failed to change the ground reality or change the economic condition of the weaker and marginalized castes.

Broadly speaking, the economic condition in Bihar changes almost every fifty kilometers. It is due to the change in caste composition, concentration of different castes in the region and presence of the ultra-leftist groups leading to changes in the nature and occurrence of economic conflict. Due to the regular onslaught against the Upper Castes by the Naxalite and the lingering fear of the occurrence thereof, many of them are forced to migrate to the cities and take up any job for survival. The lack of opportunities in the state makes them migrate to distant places like Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and other industrial cities in search of job either leaving behind their landed property or disposing them off at throw away prices.

The new economic empowerment of the intermediate castes is changing the social scene of Bihar. There are obvious indications of the lessening of traditional conflict between the Upper Castes and intermediate and lower castes. Due to the changed socio-political scenario the Upper Castes can no longer afford to be offensive to the other castes or any caste group. The impunity with which they used to indulge into economic and other kinds of exploitation is now remarkably low following the rise of the Naxal groups on the one hand and the political mobilization of the weak and oppressed castes in the name of social justice on the other. But in the true sense the process of oppression and exploitation has only experienced the change in guard. In the changed scenario, one finds the intermediate castes (mostly Yadav, and Kurmi and Koeri at few places) emerging as the new dominant castes in Bihar having considerable clout in the rural society. They're the one who are now engaged in hostile relationship with both the upper and lower castes.

Caste Conflict in the Changed Economic Scenario

The changing economic scenario has also changed the axis of caste conflict since the 1990s more particularly after the OBCs uprising following the implementation of reservation for them and their enhancing political clout. There are less instances of clash between the Forward Castes and the rest after the decline of the Ranvir Sena. Though both the Upper Castes army – the Ranvir Sena and the lower caste leftist outfits have their own versions about this social truce. Whereas the Ranvir Sena attributes it to its preparedness to take on the Naxals, the Naxals on the other hand attribute it to their ever growing ability to ensure massive reprisal. However, the fact remains that the deterrent value of both has contributed to the balance of terror in the state.

Economic hegemony of the Upper Castes which used to be one of their major strengths against the oppressed and weaker sections itself became the cause of the mobilization of the Naxal and other ultra-left outfits against them. The Naxal outfits survived on the chronic poverty and economic impoverishment of the weaker sections and lower castes. The widespread poverty helped it spread its area of influence far and wide. This increasingly led to the “pauperisation of the Upper Castes” and “created the breeding ground for Senas of different hues” [Mohanty, 2006: 20]. Bihar presents a classic example of conflict being caused by chronic poverty and economic deprivation which has often turned violent and socially counterproductive. The economic conflict has also

led to large scale migration of labour from the state and its economic profile has changed to a 'money order economy'.

The economic conflict has its roots in the age old social oppression and discrimination of the oppressed castes. The oppression deprived the oppressed castes of the opportunity to possess the sources of economic sustenance or income generation. The traditional feudal system which made feudal landlordship or landholding the prerogative of the Upper Castes also deprived the weaker and oppressed castes economically. Thus, it resulted into skewed distribution of wealth and economic status. In the recent years however, when due to the socio-political interventions some castes among the OBCs who have become economically better off, they also indulge in similar economic oppression of the remaining oppressed castes. As a consequence, the causes of economic conflict still exist. The lack of proper economic planning and the ensuing persistence of economic backwardness of the state can not obliterate the causes of economic conflict. Social justice in Bihar remains elusive and irrelevant in want of overall economic growth so that people may share prosperity rather than poverty in equal proportion.

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF CASTE CONFLICT

The political dimension of caste conflict is a rather recent phenomenon wherein caste is being used as an important element in the maneuvering of power politics. The political dimensions of caste conflict are found to be associated with the policy of reservation, the changing dynamics of power and caste politics. Besides these, it also influences power sharing among various caste groups. The social inequality prevalent in the Hindu caste construct had deprived a large section of people of their basic human rights. The predetermined and ascribed social status based on caste debarred a vast majority from pursuing education and taking up the profession of their choice. In Bihar, caste conflict manifested in the gory land disputes since land is one of the prime sources of economic sustenance in the state. The continuous political interventions in caste issues in the recent times have precipitated the conflict.

The constitution of India ensures equality of opportunity and justice to all its citizens. However, in Bihar (and elsewhere too) rightful assertions for equality of opportunity and justice by the oppressed have often led to caste conflict. The mobilization of castes manifest the power politics in the state and the process had been going on for quite sometime. The political patronage enjoyed by the various Upper Castes, OBCs, SCs and their reciprocal allegiance bears testimony of caste mobilization. Turning caste groups into 'vote bank' is the outcome of this patronage and allegiance. The policy of reservation plays a major role in turning castes and caste groups into vote bank and thus leads to caste conflict.

Caste and politics in Bihar constitute a formidable nexus with discernable impact on the electoral politics and social consciousness. The nexus works more on political pragmatism largely referred to as opportunism than anything else. It initiates the process of making caste equations for a wider electoral base and following. The formation of the nexus keeps changing. For instance, during the era of Congress rule in the state the party survived by making an Upper Castes-SCs (and Muslim) equation. It worked well for the Congress party till the assertion and rise of the OBCs during the 1970s against their neglect in the party. The era following the JP Movement in 1974 paved way for the rise and participation of the OBCs – the largest caste group in the politics of Bihar. During the

period of Laloo Yadav, OBCs tried another formidable political combination with the SCs and Muslims which may also be looked as the OBCs response to the Congress caste politics. Later on, to counteract the politics of Laloo Yadav, his political rival Nitish Kumar experimented with a rainbow combination of castes in his second tenure as chief minister. This rainbow combination was nothing but another permutation and combination of castes which created a new caste equation different from that of Laloo Yadav. The survey data explicitly supported this fact as 46.3% respondents among all caste categories felt that impact of caste and politics nexus results in the creation of new caste equations. Although the political rationale given to such an endeavour is always replete with the lofty idea of either empowering the oppressed castes or to bring social harmony, but the respondents felt otherwise. Only 27.5% respondents felt that caste and politics nexus empowers the backward and oppressed castes and even lesser 16.7% felt that it helps create social harmony (Annexure 19).

Reservation and Caste Politics in Bihar

Caste conflict in Bihar is also perpetrated by the deep rooted obsession with caste hierarchy, status, hegemony and mistrust existing among the castes. There are a large number of people belonging among the OBCs and SCs who have faced socio-economic marginalization in the past and also been oppressed for a long time on the basis of their caste. At the social and political level the most pronounced conflict between the Upper Castes and the OBCs in the recent years has been on account of the policy of reservation meant for the socio-economic upliftment of the backward and oppressed class.

In independent India, the term 'Other Backward Classes' was first used by Jawaharlal Nehru in his maiden speech before the Constituent Assembly to refer to the castes other than the Scheduled Castes. Following Nehru's speech the first Backward Class Commission was set up in 1953 which was mandated to identify such castes and advise action plan for their upliftment. In independent India, all the successive endeavours for the social upliftment of the OBCs and SCs recommended the policy of reservation to bring them at par with the rest of the castes. Hence, in pursuance of Article 340 of the Indian Constitution the first Backward Class Commission was set up by the Government of India in 1953 under the Chairmanship of Kaka Kalelkar (MP). The Terms of Reference are mentioned in Appendix 5.

The Mandal Commission Report recommendations could marginally change the existing figure of 20% reservation for the Backward Castes by 7% in Bihar. As a matter of fact, the demand for reservation in jobs and educational institutions was not new in Bihar. As early as 1971 the then Congress government yielded to the sustained demand of the OBCs to set up the Mungeri Lal Commission which identified 128 castes in Bihar as OBCs out of which 94 were identified as MBCs (Most Backward Classes). Accordingly, it recommended 26% reservation in jobs and 24% in educational institutions. While the then Jagannath Mishra Government in Bihar kept quiet on the issue, it was the Karpoori Thakur Government during the 1978 Janta Party regime which implemented it amidst fierce opposition from the Upper Caste leaders. Referring to that period of conflict Bharti (2000) made interesting observation:

“At that time also the Upper Castes had launched a fierce agitation against the reservations leading to a virtual caste war between the 'forwards' and the 'backwards'. But even during those days of rabid opposition to reservation, the Upper Castes were not averse to reservations for SCs and STs. What they opposed was reservation for the backward castes. Indeed, in their opposition to reservation for OBCs, the Upper Castes feigned compassion for the *Dalit*, as was reflected in their slogan ‘agra-harijan bhai-bhai, yeh pichhdi jati kahan se aie?’ (Upper Castes and harijans are brothers, from where have these backward castes cropped up?).” (Bharti, 2000: 310)

Besides other apprehensions, the reservation for the OBCs was in fact also seen as a potential destabilizer which could have affected the hegemony of the Upper Castes and brought about a social transformation. The Upper Castes of Bihar who did not object to the caste based reservation for the SCs were up against it being extended to the OBCs. Perhaps they were aware of the wide population base of the OBCs, their rising economic prosperity particularly among upper echelons of the Backward Castes and the socio-political repercussions of reservation for them. The Upper Castes were also concerned that the increase in reservation would deprive them of their dominance and access to education and administration in government services. Also that it would challenge Upper Castes social status.

Bharti (2009) also pointed out that the anti-reservation agitation in Bihar was an attempt by the Congress Party to break the Rajput-Backward Class alliance which played crucial role in Janta Dal's victory in the Lok Sabha elections. Congress, according to Bharti (2009) enjoyed the support of BJP in this effort. The resultant social restructuring led to political realignment in Bihar. In the process, Congress lost much of its political base among the SCs and Muslims by 1990s. The newly emerged Janta Dal acquired formidable support among the dominant Backward Castes, SCs, certain sections of the Forward Castes and Muslims. The Upper Castes largely reposed their allegiance to BJP. The Janta Dal under the leadership of Laloo Yadav in the state emerged as the pro-Mandal, pro-oppressed and pro-minority party and helped the ascendancy of the OBCs (particularly that of the Yadav) on the social and political scene. It was during the tenure of Laloo Yadav as chief minister when the castiest slogan in Hindi "*Bhure Bal Saaf Karo*" was doing rounds in Bihar. The slogan was a kind of caste acronym referring to Brahmin, Bhumihar, Lala (Kayastha) and Rajput and suggesting to wipe out their hegemony.

There's no denying the fact that historically the cause of OBCs' backwardness had certainly been on account of the social discrimination institutionalized by the Brahmanical doctrine. As such, the policy of protective discrimination by Bihar state was considered to be the best remedial method. But the Upper Caste Hindus in Bihar namely, the Brahmin, the Rajput, the Kayastha and the Bhumihar found it to be a kind of intrusion into their traditional bastion. The castes with feudal traits and traditional hegemony – The Rajput and the Bhumihar were the most vociferous in their reaction against reservation.

According to Prasad (1986) 'the lower backwards are no better than Scheduled Castes except that they are not untouchables' [Prasad, 1986: 2652]. Prasad further observed that "the four castes which comprise the upper OBCs are the Yadav (11.0 per cent), Koeri (4.0 per cent), Kurmi (3.5 per cent) and Bania (0.6 per cent). The economic condition of the Yadav, Kurmi and Koeri have significantly improved during the last 50 years." [Prasad, 1986: 2652]. Caste in Bihar remains a deeply rooted social phenomenon which polarizes for political reasons. It's deeply integrated into the social existence and psyche and therefore despite disparity and impoverishment the marginalized sections of each caste do not easily come together to form a 'class'. Das (1984) observed:

“...there is much less obvious evidence of social being articulating itself in terms of class. People in Bihar do not seem to be grouping themselves into the political- economic categories which commonly go by the labels of class. It is perhaps for this reason that many social scientists involved in making sociological inquiry into Bihar tend to ignore the concept of class as meaningful in the concrete conditions of the state' (*JOSES, 1974-1977, passim*) and concentrate their efforts much more on documenting, analysing (and often practicing) non-class social behaviour which has acquired the status of an ideology through the suffixing of 'ism' to caste and coming to terms with 'casteism'.” (Das, 1984: 1616)

A great amount of political discourse on reservation in the recent years has raised the issue of excluding the ‘creamy layer’ of the OBCs from availing the benefits of reservation. The discourse has questioned the very rationale of extending the benefits of reservation to the socio-economic and politically dominant OBCs. Among the political parties the CPI(M) in Bihar was particularly opposed to the idea of the benefits of reservation being extended to the better off referred to as ‘creamy layer’ among the OBCs. Prior to the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report Bihar already had in place a policy of reservation for the OBCs for the last fifteen years introduced by the then Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, an eminent socialist OBC leader. His policy of reservation was formulated under Article 16 of the constitutional provision for reservation for the socially and economically backward classes.

As per Karpoori Thakur’s formula, out of 20% reservation a provision was stipulated for 12% and 8% reservation respectively in jobs for the most backward and rest of the backward castes in Bihar. It also included additional 3% reservation for the economically backward among the Upper Castes. Not only that, it even excluded the economically better off among the OBCs on the basis of income. This was also not accepted without any protest but it soon got over as there was a provision for 3% reservation for the poor among the Upper Castes and women of all castes as well which left the Upper Castes a divided house.

Aftermath of Reservation in Bihar

At present Bihar has 50% reservation in the government services and educational institutions of the state. Further division of reservation among the SCs, STs, OBCs and MBCs is in the following proportion: SCs - 15%, STs - 1%, OBCs- 13%, MBCs- 18% and OBC women- 3%. The implementation of the policy of reservation has also helped in the social and political realignment of castes and caste groups in the State at various stages. The Upper Castes of the state which reconciled with the implementation of the 'Karpoori formula' of reservation scheme in 1978 became the most vociferous opponent of reservation policy after the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report recommendations during chief minister Laloo Yadav tenure.

Laloo Yadav who first emerged as the leader of the oppressed and downtrodden with the solid support of both the SCs and OBCs was now recognized as the leader of the Yadav and the Muslims (the proverbial MY combination) as a sizeable section of the OBCs felt aggrieved with his pro-Yadav politics and indifference to the MBCs demands. However, his single biggest contribution was to give the oppressed and marginalized section of the society a voice a sense of confidence and political representation. The new caste equation in Bihar politics has brought the MBCs closer to the Upper Castes.

The biggest critique of the policy of caste based reservation is that it ignores merit and doesn't indicate the time limit for the government to be able to fully achieve social equality through reservation. Reservation itself enshrines a kind of selective discrimination and thus the very rationale of compensatory discrimination is questioned. Today the dominant among the OBCs, SCs are no less privileged than the Upper Castes and certainly more privileged than the weak among many Upper Castes. The politicians in Bihar have tried to use reservation as a handy tool to achieve social justice. The issue is so volatile that no political party involved in the electoral politics can afford to antagonize the sizeable chunk of voters by either opposing or reanalyzing it.

The logical outcome of the policy of reservation in Bihar has been further fragmentation of the various castes and caste groups which unleashed a process of social and political realignment. In the early decades of independence for instance the Congress Party led by the Upper Castes had aligned with the Brahmin, the Scheduled Castes and the minorities to create its traditional vote bank. But in the post-emergency period in 1970s Janta Party managed realignment of castes in Bihar which ensured the defeat of the Congress Party. This was achieved with the help of the OBCs and others. In both 1977 and 1989 elections,

the OBCs voted against the Congress Party. During the 1995 Bihar Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) elections, the Upper Castes were at a fix as their traditional political party Congress was reduced to a non-entity and BJP was yet to replace Congress as a viable alternative. At the same time the OBCs alliance was further divided into two political factors led by the Yadav in the Janta Dal and Kurmi and Koeri in the Samta Party. Shah (2002) observed:

“The result of the 1995 Assembly election in Bihar set the trend for Backward Caste politics. It was the first time the backwards fought against backwards and the Upper-Castes at best remained at the margins of the political struggle. The backwards managed to have a firm control over political power. It was the type of political struggle which Bihar witnessed then that set the trend for Backward Caste politics for the next few years.” (Shah, 2002: 8)

There’s no doubt that with reservation the backward and the oppressed classes started getting conscious of their social and political rights, in the post-Mandal era they relished the boon of empowerment which gave them the hope for ‘*saman adhikar*’ and ‘*samman*’ (equal rights and dignity). The caste system essentially based on hierarchy and inequality when aligned with the universal adult franchise becomes an instrument of equalization and dignity (Beteille 1996; Kothari; 1970, Rudolph and Rudolph; 1987 et al.). It seems to be apparent in the case of Bihar more particularly in the context of the policy and politics of reservation. If reservation was an empowerment of sorts, it gave the oppressed and the Backward Classes something which no socio-religious initiative could have given them— a sense of pride and identity.

The new political reality gave the OBCs and SCs the opportunity to “deconstruct” and “reinvent” their caste history, mobilize together as a “caste category” (of OBCs and SCs) and use their headcount for electoral gains which came to their rescue to fight the age old caste prejudices, discrimination and domination. And as Varshney (2000) observed, the Upper Castes, the beneficiary of the caste system for centuries wished castes didn’t exist when faced with the caste challenges from below. There’s an obvious caste based assertion for social justice among the oppressed and the Backward Castes. However, in its undertone it defies the Upper Castes hegemony and privileges which they cherished for long. In Bihar, the concept of social justice nowhere negates the

irrelevance of caste system under the democratic polity. On the contrary it reinforces by recognizing caste as a political force inevitable for electoral gains.

Reservation Politics and Laloo Yadav

It was the Laloo Prasad Yadav government in Bihar which changed the existing reservation from 20% to 24% in February 1993 by an ordinance and gave a new dimension to the politics of reservation and ensuing caste conflict. Under the new scheme an increase of 2% was made in the quota of both the MBCs and OBCs thus making it 14% and 10% respectively. The Ordinance struck down the 3% quota for the economically poor Upper Castes formulated by Karpoori Thakur. Instead it introduced 2% reservation for the OBC, SC and ST women. It excluded the Upper Castes women from the list ignoring gender as the indicator of socio-educational backwardness. The new ordinance also ensured the safeguard of economically well off OBCs by striking down the criteria of income tax ceiling.

Laloo Yadav argued that the Supreme Court in its judgment has not accepted economic status as a criterion and has upheld “social and educational backwardness” as the basis for job reservation. In a nutshell, with one ordinance he consolidated his OBCs vote bank on the one hand while on the other laid the foundation for further fragmentation of the OBCs into OBCs and MBCs²⁵ (Most Backward Classes). This situation created favourable ground for the emergence of another Backward leader Nitish Kumar as the *bête noire* of Laloo Yadav who chose to do MBCs politics and give them the leadership. The MBCs group felt threatened that the new reservation policy of Laloo Yadav would leave them even more marginalized as compared to the Yadav despite 2% increase in the quota. Therefore they united under the forums of *Karpoori Rachna Chakra* and *Karpoori Vichar Manch*. The MBC Coordination Committee meeting held at Patna on February 15, 1993 unanimously proposed that the any change in the Karpoori Thakur earlier scheme (also referred to as Karpoori Plan) should be done in such a manner that it doesn't affect the interest of the MBCs adversely. It thus proposed a 16.5% job reservation for the MBCs.

²⁵ MBCs and EBCs are synonymous terms referring to the same group of castes in Bihar. However, in the state of Maharashtra EBC stands for Economically Backward Classes as against Extremely Backward Classes in the context of Bihar. The Government of Bihar uses *Ati Pichhada Varg* to denote both MBCs and EBCs in Hindi. Therefore, in this study EBCs and MBCs, wherever used in this study would mean the same.

Hindustan Times (February 1, 1993) reported that the senior Janta Dal leader Ram Sunder Das was of the view that the Karpoori Thakur scheme was 'more scientific and justifiable' as compared to Laloo Yadav's scheme. It was so because the earlier took into account the interest of the poor among the Forward Castes and the women. Das also criticized the government's hurry to implement reservation ordinance without categorizing the Backward Castes and identify the 'creamy layer' for exclusion from the benefits of the reservation as directed by the Supreme Court. Chaudhary (1993) reported that the Ramdhari Bind the leader of the *Bihar Rajya Atyant Picchada Varg Evam Upekshit Samaj*, (Bihar State Most Backward Group and Neglected Section) noted the manner in which the Bihar Government tried to implement the reservation ordinance was against the formula of social justice championed by the Janata Dal. Laloo Yadav's hurried implementation for social justice was certainly not concerned about social harmony as much as for consolidating his vote bank. Thus, it precipitated a new phase of caste conflict by further widening the gap between the Upper Castes, OBCs and MBCs. The continuing rift and division between OBCs and MBCs since the 1950s was further widened as a result of new reservation ordinance.

The broad difference between the OBCs and MBCs is that while the OBCs are largely landholding agrarian castes having numerical strength, the MBCs are largely artisan and service castes such as Badhai (Carpenter), Kumhar (Potter), Lohar (Ironsmith), Tatwan (Hindu Weaver), Mali (Gardener), Kahar (Palanquin Carrier), Mallah (Fishermen) and others and lack numerical strength. The reason why the MBCs protested against Laloo Yadav's reservation plan was while he marginally increased their reservation percentage from 12 to 14%, he also simultaneously shifted some 10 castes from the OBC to the MBC category thus making more space for the dominant among the Backward Castes and adding to the already crowded slot of the MBCs. The group of MBCs therefore today not only demands even higher percentage in the state reservation quota, but also in the central services quota, in the judiciary, in the state legislative assembly and in the parliament to come at par with the OBC representation at such places which is largely shared between the Yadav, the Kurmi, the Banias and the Koeri.²⁶

In the Indian Constitution the term 'backward classes' finds place under articles 15(4) and 16(4) which empower the State to make special provision for any socially and

²⁶ The paragraph is based on the discussion with an MBC activist based at Patna. Detail in Annexure 2.

educationally backward classes (SEBCs) of citizens. Nevertheless, unlike the socially and educationally backward categories of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) conspicuously defined and articulated, the category of OBCs remained rather ambiguous. According to the Sachar Committee Report of 2006 the term 'backward classes' came into usage during the British period but at that time it was used in a: "variety of referents and evidently without any clearly specified parameters regarding the inclusion and exclusion of groups clubbed as backwards." (Sachar Committee Report of 2006: Chapter 10: 2)

Caste and Power Politics in Bihar

Power in a democratic structured social system refers to the capacity of an individual or their collectivity of getting things done in a situation when the intent or purpose is faced with any kind of resistance with group or individuals. It comes into display either by use of coercive action or by mobilizing consent. Parsons (1963) elaborates it in the following terms: "there is the problem of the relation between the coercive and the consensual aspects. A major tendency is to hold that somehow 'in the last analysis' power comes down to one or the other, i.e., to 'rest on' command of coercive sanctions, or on consensus and the will to voluntary cooperation." [Parsons, 1963: 232].

Power is often associated with coercion or the raw use of force, however, in a democratic polity persuasive consensus building may also be considered a dimension of power. It becomes the integral part of political process as far as power politics is concerned, that in itself involves creating required organizations to achieve the fixed goals by mobilizing required resources. It's under this theoretical supposition of Parsons [1963: 233] that one may analyze the role of caste in the process of power politics. Caste becomes the resource - the basic unit of the larger constituency which is mobilized to achieve the goal of attaining and retaining political power. Economic injustice and extreme exploitation become the causes which precipitate caste conflict and the situation is exploited by political parties and leaders for attaining power.

The left political parties lay stress on the existence of economic injustice and exploitation of the deprived class and interpret such a situation in terms of Communist political ideology of class conflict. In the Marxian scheme of things class conflict essentially has an economic dimension which is used for political mobilization and conflict resolution. Political conflict also manifests an unequal deprivation existing in

the society an economic gap between what a class of people deserves and what they receive. In other words, it's about people's value expectations and value capabilities. [Schock: 1996: 101].

In the context of Bihar's caste conflict, the syndrome of relative deprivation plays a vital role. The political parties involved in power politics have used the relative deprivation among various castes groups to their advantage by creating new caste equations. The Congress Party besides cultivating the identity of being the party of the Upper Castes in Bihar was simultaneously aligning itself with the *Dalit* or the Scheduled Castes – economically and socially the most deprived caste group in the state. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) enjoyed traditional support of the *Vaisya* who despite being economically well-off faces deprivation in terms of social and political status as compared to Upper Castes. Hence, BJP at a later date invented another constituency among the Upper Castes as well since the Upper Castes were getting disenchanted with their shrinking electoral representation in the Congress party.

Among the Upper Castes and the dominant OBCs the worst sufferer of the surging and polarizing caste politics were the Kayasthas who were doubly jeopardized. Within the internal power structure of Congress Party Kaysthas were completely marginalized by rest of the three Upper Castes – Brahmin, Bhumihaar and Rajput in Bihar as they were numerically weak, less caste conscious and therefore politically less organized. Outside the Congress they were not accommodated properly by the OBCs led parties because hierarchically they belonged to the Upper Castes. As a result, Kaysthas almost lost their political presence and representation in assembly and parliament. The lack of their political representation has adversely affected their socio-economic status too that they enjoyed at one point of time.

The hegemony of the Congress Party in the state politics was marginalized after its defeat in the 1967 state elections. The ensuing years not only saw rise in the OBCs politics, but also a series of social, political and even violent caste conflicts discussed in the previous Chapters. The emergence of Laloo Yadav in the latter half of 1980s as a strong state OBCs leader helped the Janata Dal (formed after split in Janata Party) win 122 seats out of 324 in the Assembly elections of 1990. The election results made Laloo Yadav the strongest OBC leader in Bihar. Corruption charges forced Laloo Yadav to form a new political party RJD

(Rashtriya Janata Dal) in the year 1997. In fact the process of caste realignment in Bihar begun during the 1970s and the dominant middle caste groups – the OBCs were keenly aspiring to get larger share in power politics of the state. The emergence of green revolution helped create a dominant middle caste group among the OBCs which was now economically well-off and politically ambitious.

In the power politics of Bihar the biggest contribution of Laloo Yadav was that he gave a sense of *Izzat* (respect) and empowerment to the OBCs and the *Dalit* with his style of politics. As a result, Laloo Yadav as the chief minister of the State set in motion a new phase of democratization which empowered the relatively deprived castes and caste groups to have their say in power politics. His image of being the benefactor of the “*Garib-Gurba*” (the poor and downtrodden) had electrifying and instant appeal to the socially and politically deprived OBCs who for ages were under the subjugation of the Upper Castes.

Caste Assertiveness for Political Space

The rising assertiveness of the OBCs for political space in the power structure reflects in the ever rising participation in the electoral politics. The assertiveness was reflected in the ever-growing number of the election contestants in the subsequent years after 1952 Bihar Vidhan Sabha elections. The democratization of polity albeit with its own cunning techniques has been visible in Bihar. Without doubt, caste politics has played an important role in influencing the political assertiveness over a period of time and also maturing of democratic system.

Caste for Power Attainment

It will be rather erroneous to believe that people in Bihar do not understand the ulterior design behind caste politics. What is surprising is the fact that despite being aware of the divisive nature of caste politics majority of them still align on caste lines when it comes to attainment of political power. Does it mean that caste consciousness and affinity are used in politics for some short term gains- largely electoral in nature? As far as the people of Bihar are concerned they are acutely aware of the uncomfortable reality that the role of caste in Bihar's politics has become divisive and it is used by the political class to divide and rule. 38.3 percent respondents in the survey endorsed this fact. (Annexure 20)

In politics attainment of power is the prime objective while politics becomes the instrument to secure and maintain it. The ultimate power in a democracy lies with the people. Therefore the political parties for attaining power, targets people, their groups and associations. It's in this process that primary associations like caste, religion, ethnicity become important and whose support become crucial for the purpose of attaining and retaining power. One of the reasons of the importance of primary groups is also the lack of effective secondary groups such as trade unions, business groups, and professional groups. The democratic pluralism is thus reflected through caste pluralism and caste aspirations. Political system has never shied away from exploiting it. In the political power structure of a democracy, political parties play the major role of articulating the aspirations and demands of various groups. The demands are often mutually conflicting as they emanate from various interest groups. They are addressed as per their political advantage and mileage. Caste being a primary group in Bihar thus cannot be ignored by the political parties. Blair (1972) observes:

“The effect of this political flabbiness manifested by secondary groups is that the political system must fall back upon primary groups if the articulation process is to take place at all. Religion, language, culture, and race are all important cleavages producing primary groups at the national level in India, and in some measure at the state level as well. But at the local level, where these other divisions do not exist for the most part, the caste system produces the most significant cleavage.” (Blair, 1972: 109)

Caste and Intra-Party Conflict

The Congress Party the oldest and one of the biggest political parties in India, has been a hotbed of intra-party caste conflict much before independence. The party which worked as a political organization to fight against the British rule in India at the knock of freedom at the doorstep started getting polarized on caste lines. The various castes could now sense the benefits of political power in independent India which gave rise to the caste-centric power politics. India after independence had changed into a: “structural system to translate or convert (or be converted by) social and economic interest into political power directly”. [Eldersveld: 1964: 6]. The Congress Party got polarized in Bihar at the district level on the basis of caste as early as 1940s. There existed two main

rival groups in Congress each comprising of various castes. The rivalry was so intense that the Congress High command had to send Maulana Azad to Bihar to sort out the problem of the warring factions.

In the post independence period in Bihar, though it was a party representing almost all caste groups, but during the initial years the leadership and dominance of Rajput and Bhumihar was obvious. The first Chief Minister of the state Shri Krishna Singh was a Bhumihar who had enjoyed the solid support of other castemen as well. But after the 1952 elections the Bhumihar felt sidelined with the ascendance of Mahesh Prasad Sinha, another Bhumihar leader and a close relative of SK Singh as his right hand. It led to the defection of Sinha's trusted leaders. Analyzing caste polarization within the Congress Party Roy (1966) observed:

“By 1953 almost all the important non-Bhumihar supporters of the Chief Minister had left his camp. They could not be absorbed into the Rajput group to which they had been opposed from the very beginning, and thus a “Centrist Group” emerged which directed its entire energy to discrediting M. P. Sinha [Mahesh Prasad Sinha] who, the members of centrist group felt, was responsible for their grievances.” (Roy, 1966: 711)

Mahesh Prasad Sinha's rivalry with K B Sahay, a Kayastha leader was an open secret. Both of them lost the 1957 election having worked against each other. K B Sahay who was leading the Centrist Group later aligned with the Rajput and succeeded in becoming the chief minister in 1963 and continued till 1967 as a formidable Chief Minister. A faction of the Rajput leaders joined the camp of Binodanand Jha who was a Brahmin and thus yet another caste group emerged within the Congress. Later on, it was to counter the Rajput and Bhumihar dominance that K B Sahay promoted the OBC leader Ram Lakhan Singh Yadav who remained loyal to him all through.

A fractionalized Congress Party in Bihar certainly was a big impetus for caste-centric power politics. Though till the emergence of Janta Party in 1977 following the historic JP Movement, (the movement led by the eminent Socialist leader Jai Prakash Narayan) the Upper Castes' dominance was still visible in most of the political parties including the

Congress Party. But with the formation of Janta Party, which was a large amalgamation of various non-Congress political parties viz. Bhartiya Jana Sangha, Bhartiya Lok Dal, Bhartiya Kranti Dal, Swatantra Party, Socialist Party, the Congress factions namely Congress (O), Congress (R), Praja Socialist Party the process of OBCs resurgence in Bihar's politics was apparent. The idea of "affirmative action" for the upliftment of the socially and economically backward classes emerged as stronger political agenda. The Socialist influences, particularly of Ram Manohar Lohia, underpinning that the deprived castes should be pushed to positions of power and leadership was now being pursued more seriously by this non-Congress political party formation. Following the Emergency, the Janata Party government in Bihar came to power in 1977 with Karpooori Thakur, a Socialist leader of OBC background as the Chief Minister who continued till 1979. He was followed by SC Ram Sunder Das, again a Socialist. Ram Sunder Das remained Chief Minister till 1980 after which the Janata Party was disintegrated and the Congress Party rule was once again established for yet another decade till 1990.

The Congress Party during 1980-90 had five Chief Ministers out of which three were Brahmin and two Rajput. One of the reasons of the disillusionment of the OBCs from the Congress party was on the ground of their poor representation within the party and the government power structure. There was a dominance of the Upper Caste members in the Legislative Assembly as well as in the state cabinet. In Bihar Congress Party survived on its traditional and time-tested combination of the Upper Castes, Scheduled Castes and Muslims which reflected not only in its organizational structure and support base, but also in its power structure till the time the OBC resurgence emerged as a real threat to its survival. As a result, to regain its shifting electoral base, Congress in the 1990 Legislative Assembly elections of Bihar fielded an all time high 105 OBCs candidates out of which 80 belonged to the upper OBCs.

OBCs Politics and Caste Polarization in Bihar

Historically the OBCs uprise in Bihar was an outcome of the political thought of the Socialist leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia, Acharya Narendra Dev and others. Since the inception in 1948 the Socialist Party evolved an ideological framework of including those people outside the fold of traditional social elite. The Socialist Party largely under the influence of Ram Manohar Lohia's socio-political thought considered caste an important factor for the democratization and egalitarian economic distribution. Thus

Socialist Party stressed that “in the framework of a democratic system certain sections of the society had to be mobilised” [Jaffrelot 2003: 259].

The non-Congress parties such as Janata Party, Janata Dal, Samata Party, Rashtriya Janta Dal followers of the JP Movement in post-emergency Bihar largely adopted the ideological framework of the socialist ideologies in principle. As a result, the polarization of the OBCs around such political parties in Bihar came not only as a major blow to the Congress Party but also to its political base dominated by the Upper Castes. Among the various castes in Bihar political conflict was thus triggered after the decline of the Congress Party hegemony. At the same time, the non-Congress political parties infused their own brand of ‘caste politics’ to counter Congress’ castiest politics.

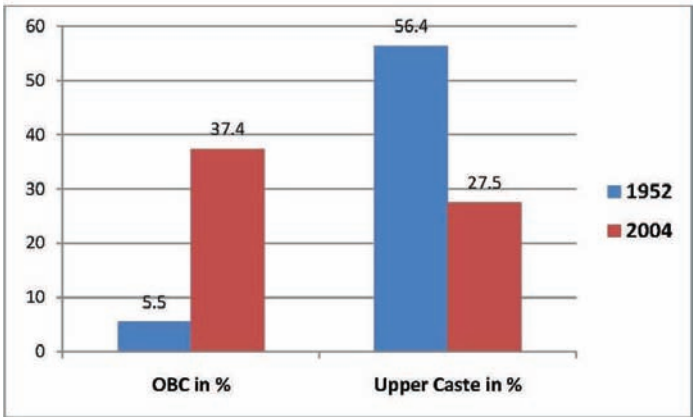
The political power structure in Bihar changed after the arrival of Janata Dal Government in the Centre in 1989 with VP Singh as the Prime Minister and Laloo Yadav’s Government in Bihar in 1990. Janata Dal under the leadership of Ram Sunder Das and Laloo Yadav convincingly defeated Congress Party. As the election analysis showed out of the 324 seats Congress contested on 323 and could manage to win only 71 seats. With a total of 79,46,635 votes cast its favour, it had a vote share of 24.78%. As compared to Congress Party, Janata Dal fielded 276 candidates and was able to win 122 seats. With 82,12,666 votes cast in its favour its vote share was 25.61%. It emerged as the single largest party in the Bihar Legislative Assembly and managed to form a coalition government with the help of the left parties and others. In the same election BJP which contested on 237 seats could manage to win only 39 seats and had a vote share of 11.61%.

In the 1990 Legislative Assembly elections for the first time the percentage of the OBCs MLAs marginally exceeded the Upper Caste MLAs which was recorded as 34.9% as against 34.6% respectively. Though marginal, it was possible because of the presence of Janata Dal in the election fray mainly against the Congress Party. OBC candidates helped record gains in this election. Janata Dal OBC MLAs comprised of 43.8% whereas the Upper Castes were reduced to 25.6%. Out of this 43.8%, OBC MLAs Yadav alone comprised of 29.8%. In the entire Legislative Assembly the Yadav emerged as the single largest caste group with 19.1% elected representatives.

A comparative analysis from 1952-2004 of the OBCs vis-à-vis the Forward Castes’ elected members of the Parliament from Bihar gives an idea of the OBC political

resurgence over the years from a meager 5.5% to 37.4%, while the Upper Caste representation during the same period fell from 56.4% to 27.5% as seen in Graph 5.

Graph 5. Difference in OBC and Upper Caste Representation from Bihar in the Parliament-1952 and 2004

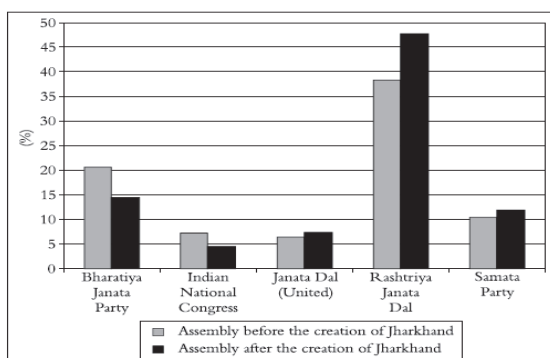


Data Source: Robin, Cyril. Bihar: The New Stronghold of OBC Politics, 2009

For a brief period Congress Party managed to sail on the sympathy wave following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi and consequently won 196 seats out of 324 in the 1985 Vidhan Sabha elections. But the gain was rather temporary. Congress Party couldn't arrest the downward trend of the OBC representation. This is reflected in the representation of its OBC MLAs which fell to 17.3% since 1952. The Mandal effect also branded Congress as a more pro-Upper Caste party and the OBCs shift to Janata Dal and later to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Laloo Yadav and Samata Party (later JDU) of Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav was quite conspicuous.

The downturn in the representation of Congress Party in the Bihar Legislative Assembly saw the corresponding rise in the pro-Mandal and pro-OBC political parties including the BJP which preferred the politics of religion over the politics of caste. BJP also could not overlook the importance of castes in the politics of Bihar and tried to expand its base through inclusion of OBCs into its fold. Graph 6 shows the shrunk social base of Congress and the expanding social base of the pro-OBC parties in the year 2000 before and after the creation of Jharkhand.

Graph 6. Representation of Main Political Parties in Bihar Vidhan Sabha, 2000

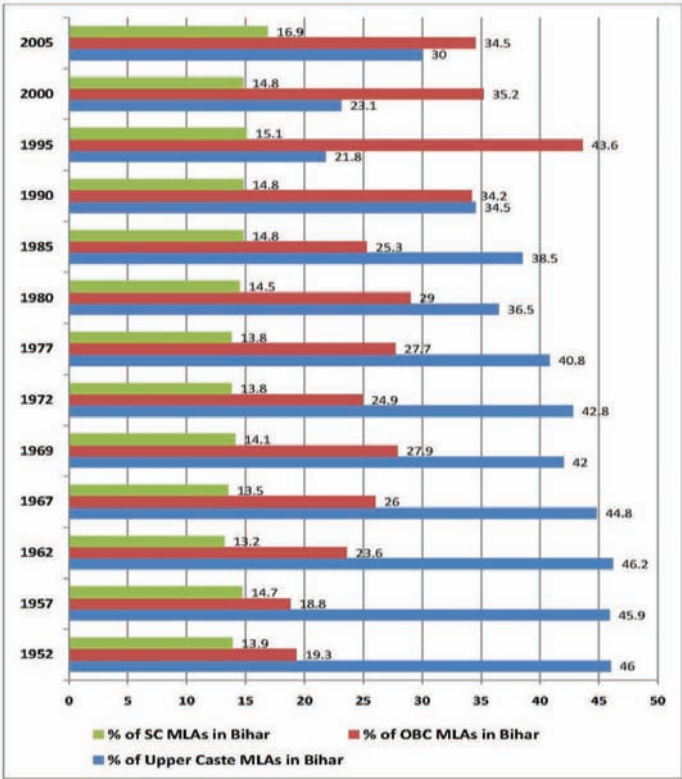


Source: Robin, Cyril. Bihar: The New Stronghold of OBC Politics, 2009

The Rise of OBCs Political Power

The pro-OBC politics in the state which became more vociferous after the major political debacle of Congress Party following the J P Movement of 1974 and the establishment of Janata Party Government in Bihar in 1977 resulted in corresponding rise in the representation of the OBCs in Bihar Legislative Assembly. OBCs which considerably constitute 37% population in Bihar came close to their proportionate representation in 1990 by gaining 34.2% seats which was just 0.3% less than the Upper Castes' representation. In 1995 the OBC representation was not only all time high at 43.6%, but it also exceeded the percentage of its population. As compared to the OBCs representation, the SC representation did not register any dramatic rise during 1952-2005 in Bihar Legislative Assembly. The representation of the Upper Castes fell from 46% in 1952 to 30% in 2005 as seen in Graph 7.

Graph 7. Percent Change in Representation of Castes in Bihar Vidhan Sabha 1952-2005



Data Source: Robin, Cyril. Bihar: The New Stronghold of OBC Politics, 2009

Though Graph 7 presents the cumulative figure in the rise in OBC representation, not all OBCs mattered in the power politics of Bihar during the early years of transition in the political hegemony. Not all of them matter even today. That is one of the reasons why even now various caste groups among the OBCs such as the Teli (Oil Pressers), the Dhanuk, the Mali and many more are asserting their individual caste identity to get the political space and proportionate representation. Laloo Yadav’s method of social justice could not give proportionate representation to the ‘Extremely Backward Classes’ (EBCs) and the weaker sections among the SCs (*Dalit*) called ‘*Mahadalit*’. This situation brought the Yadav caste and Laloo Yadav in conflict with the other OBCs namely the Kurmi and the Koeri.

The Backward Caste politics got polarized post 1995 Bihar Vidhan Sabha elections into two main OBC axes, one by the Yadav dominated Janata Dal led by Laloo Yadav and the other by the Kurmi and the Koeri dominated Samta Party led by Nitish Kumar. The politics of Bihar once again got extremely factionalised among caste lines and the so called OBC unity was exposed. As a result, with just 27.9% vote cast in its favour, Janata Dal managed to get absolute majority by winning 166 seats and its allies CPI, CPI (M), JMM (S) won 26, 6 and 16 seats respectively and the alliance was able to form a formidable government under Laloo Yadav.

The Electoral Performance of Castes

Samata Party under the leadership of Nitish Kumar with some electoral arrangement with CPI (ML) and BJP was supposed to make a big dent in the Janata Dal OBCs vote bank. But its own performance was abysmal and it hardly managed to win 7 seats and get 7.37% vote share in the 1995 Bihar Vidhan Sabha elections. In the same election the Upper Castes votes also got largely polarized and divided among the Congress and BJP. In the absence of considerable support from the OBCs and *Dalit*, Congress could manage to win 29 seats and had a vote share of 16.51%. BJP on the other hand largely with the support of the Upper Castes and *Vaisya* could manage to win 41 seats, nevertheless, in comparison to Congress its vote share was just 13.37% in the 1995 Bihar Vidhan Sabha elections.

The polarization and conflict among various castes and caste groups in Bihar along political lines also reflected in the three consecutive Parliamentary elections during 1991-1998 in which the champions of 'social justice' political parties namely the Janata Dal (JD) and its breakaway group Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Laloo Yadav showed remarkable improvement not only in terms of the seat tally but also in the vote percent. Table 9.1 gives an idea of the electoral performance of the Congress, BJP and the social justice political parties in North Bihar during the 1991-98 Lok Sabha elections. There is a clear decline in the performance of the Congress Party both in terms of seats and vote share while the BJP, JD and RJD experienced upswing in their performance.

Table 14. Electoral Performance in the North Bihar Lok Sabha Election 1991-98

Year	Turn out	Congress			BJP+			JD+			RJD		
		Con- tested	Won	Vote Per Cent	Con- tested	Won	Vote Per Cent	Con- tested	Won	Vote Per Cent	Con- tested	Won	Vote Per Cent
1991	64.4	25	0	22.8	24	0	13.0	25	25	53.9	-	-	-
1996	61.0	26	1	12.1	24	6	33.8	27	18	45.4	-	-	-
1998	66.6	10	2	5.5	25	8	35.0	28	1	18.3	20	14	29.4

Note: Total Seats 26

Source: Kumar, Sanjay. E&P Weekly, Vol. 34, No. 34/35 (Aug. 21 - Sep. 3, 1999)

In the erstwhile South Bihar (now Jharkhand) it was BJP which improved not only in terms of seat tally but also in terms of vote percent. The reason may largely be attributed to BJP's urban and Upper Caste vote bank. The result is apparent from the Table 15

Table 15. Electoral Performance in the South Bihar Lok Sabha Elections

Year	Turnout	Congress			BJP+			JD+			JMM		
		Con- tested	Won	Vote (per cent)	Con- tested	Won	Vote (per cent)	Con- tested	Won	Vote (per cent)	Con- tested	Won	Vote (per cent)
1991	49.9	14	0	17.9	14	5	32.9	7	3	12.5	8	6	21.4
1996	54.8	14	1	16.0	14	12	34.0	14	0	24.3	14	1	12.2
1998	59.7	7	2	15.7	14	12	45.5	10	0	6.2	8	0	10.5

Note: Total Seats 14.

Source: Kumar, Sanjay. E&P Weekly, Vol. 34, No. 34/35 (Aug. 21 - Sep. 3, 1999)

In the 1998 Lok Sabha elections the only seat Janata Dal could retain was the reserved seat of Hajipur which Ram Vilas Paswan won. From 31.9% vote share in 1996, Janata Dal's vote share got reduced to mere 8.3% in 1998. The party which emerged as the top most gainer was BJP which managed to win 19 seats and 23.1% vote share. RJD which fought both the BJP and its ally Samata Party won 17 seats and 25.2% vote. Thus in terms of vote share it was the single largest party which reflected Laloo Yadav's influence on the Yadav caste and other OBCs and *Dalit* voters despite the clear split in their vote share. The Congress vote bank remained largely confined to the Upper Castes in which BJP was now a co-sharer. Not only that, due to its poll alliance with RJD, it

was left to contest on fewer seats and could win only on five seats. The BJP-Samata alliance ostensibly created to keep Laloo Yadav and his Yadav-centric politics at bay was infact a caste conflict of sorts in which the Upper Castes polarized with the BJP while the non-Yadav OBCs came together with Samata Party to counter Laloo's caste arithmetic.

The Political Shift and Polarization of Castes

Table 9.3 provides trend of voters' shift between 1995-1998 Vidhan Sabha elections. Analysis shows polarization of a definite pattern of castes on the political lines which were perceived to be representing their cause during the Lok Sabha elections of 1995-1996 and 1998. Table 16 shows that Congress Party which enjoyed the largest support base 39.1% among the Upper Castes, lost it substantially in 1995 and it was reduced to 10.1% in the very next year 1996 and further slid to 8.7% in 1998.

Table 16. Percentage Shift of Upper Caste Voters in Lok Sabha Elections (1995-1998)

Party	1995	1996	1998
Congress	39.1	10.1	8.7
BJP+	28.7	59.5	77.6
JD+	20.9	29.1	11.6
RJD	—	—	Negligible

Data Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996-1998

In spite of pro-OBC posture Janata Dal and its allies enjoyed lesser support from OBCs as compared to Congress Party earlier. In the 1996 elections it saw a considerable shift of nearly 9% from the previous year's elections but eventually in the 1998 elections the shift was reduced to 11.6% though still higher in comparison to Congress. The most pronounced Upper Caste shift was visible towards the BJP which never looked back ever since 1995 and saw substantial rise in the Upper Caste voters' shift which began from 28.7% in 1995, increased more than double to 59.5% in 1996 and eventually settled at a phenomenal 77.6% in the 1998 Lok Sabha elections. The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) of Laloo Yadav being a relatively new political party had yet to make its

mark. As far as the OBCs are concerned, their preference for the socialist ideologies as compared to the pro-Upper Caste Congress Party was apparent. As a result, their shift from Congress and move towards Janata Dal and its allies since the 1995 Lok Sabha elections is apparent from Table 17

Table 17. Percentage Shift among the OBCs Voters 1995-1998 Lok Sabha Elections

Party	1995	1996	1998
Congress	13.7	9.9	7.9
BJP+	26.2	36.2	42.5
JD+	49.8	50.3	17.3
RJD	—	—	28.0

Data Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996-1998

The exception was 1998 elections in which due to the formation of RJD as a breakaway group of Janata Dal attracted 28.0% OBC voters. BJP with its partner Samata Party together attracted the largest shift which increased from 26.2% in 1995 to 36.2% in 1996 and further to 42.5% in 1998. However, the Kurmi and Koeri caste combine of Samata Party along with other non-Yadav lower OBC voters such as Lohar, Kahar, Kumhar, Teli, Dhanuk and the rest had a major role to play in this shift.

Table 18 gives an idea about the shift among the *Dalit* voters during the 1995-1998 Lok Sabha elections in Bihar. Although the *Dalit* were part of Congress Party's core constituency along with Upper Castes and Muslims, but in the *Dalit* category also it was Congress Party which became the biggest loser. From 13.7% in 1995 to 9.9% in 1996 and finally 7.9% in 1998 the declining trend was quite noticeable. Janata Dal (JD) with its allies had a significant positive shift in 1995 and 1996 elections (49.8% and 50.3% respectively). But it sharply fell to 17.3% in 1998, largely due to RJD pull which alone was 28% and also due to the gradual shift towards the BJP-Samata combine from 26.2% in 1995 to 36.2% in 1996 and finally to 42.5% in 1998 one of the highest among all political allies and parties.

Table 18. Percentage Shift among the *Dalit* Voters 1995-1998 Lok Sabha Elections

Party	1995	1996	1998
Congress	13.7	9.9	7.9
BJP+	26.2	36.2	42.5
JD+	49.8	50.3	17.3
RJD	—	—	28.0

Data Source: Bihar Survey 1995, National Election Study 1996-1998

On the whole, the analysis indicated a general trend of political alliance among the three caste groups rather than any specific voting pattern of each one of its constituents. The reason being caste groups are not monolithic entities and thus their preferences even in terms of shift are subject to various other social and personal considerations as well. What is important here is the indication that in Bihar power politics got polarized around castes and their conflicting interests.

The caste conflict among the Upper Castes and the OBCs was practically settled following the decline of the Congress rule in the state and all other political parties even their splinter groups concentrated their entire energy on wooing the OBCs and *Dalit* since it was proved that the Upper Castes neither had the number nor the inclination to unite as a monolithic political group. Following the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, the Upper Castes in Bihar started losing their political space, hegemony and leadership and it gradually shifted towards the OBCs and *Dalit*. As a result, the battleground of political conflict also shifted and the new political conflict involved primarily the OBCs and the *Dalit*.

No caste group is a cohesive homogenous group, it's rather a deliberate political construct; therefore the idea of reaching social justice through affirmative action in practice encourages further division within the existing group and creates conducive environment for political conflict. Prior to the political emergence of the OBCs there was a constant conflict for leadership and hegemony among the four Upper Castes namely the Brahmin,

Rajput, Kayastha and Bhumihaar. The OBCs further got divided into Extremely Backward Classes (EBC also referred to as MBC or Most Backward Classes) and the *Dalit* into *Mahadalit*. Both the groups exclude the dominant among the OBCs and *Dalit* and assert for their own political space and share in the socio-political domain.

In the caste conflict of Bihar *Dalit* also played a major role and were recognized as a winning element in the caste combination. All political parties including Congress, BJP, RJD, and LJP did their best to bring them into their fold. In Bihar out of 324 Assembly constituencies 48 constituencies are reserved for the *Dalit*. In the 2000 Assembly elections of Bihar, the *Dalit* also contested from 4 unreserved seats. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by BJP wooed the *Dalit* leader Ram Vilas Paswan to garner the *Dalit* support. But Paswan's prime interest was with his own caste fellow Dusadh and in the 2000 Assembly elections he managed to win 10 out of the 16 reserved constituencies for Paswan. The gradual politicization of castes and their use in power politics initially pitched the three caste groups against each other. The natural fallout was inventing of more caste groups and perpetual caste conflict.

The prolonged caste conflict in Bihar had its own socio-political impact for sure. The impact may be analyzed from various perspectives which clearly reflect the views of the various caste groups. The field survey data indicated that the Upper Castes, the OBCs and the SCs were not unanimous with regard to their views about the impact of caste conflict on the society and politics of Bihar.

The majority 47.9 percent respondents which included 63.4 percent SCs and 54.2 percent OBCs looked at the outcome of caste conflict in a rather positive manner and believed that it has helped the OBCs and SCs enjoy their socio-political rights. As against that 46.8 percent Upper Castes felt that due to the caste conflict distance between different castes has increased in society. However, only 24.4 percent SCs and 28.3 percent OBCs supported the Upper Caste views. If we analyze the inference of the data further it brings us closer to the idea that caste conflict has not only given the OBCs and SCs an identity but has also instilled in them a new sense of confidence and pride; something which was considered to be bestowed to the Upper Castes as their ascribed attribute and something the OBCs and SCs had been deprived of for centuries. (Annexure 21)

The heterogeneity of castes was exploited by deliberately overlooking the harmony model. The political class underscored the conflict model and adopted a caste-centric approach towards extending social justice. It grossly overlooked the fact that within each caste and caste group there also exists an *amir* and *garib* (rich and poor) class and that the 'dominant class syndrome' is not caste specific rather it's class specific. The mighty and resourceful among each caste suffer from the 'dominant class syndrome'. The dominance of the Yadav, Koeri and Kurmi among the OBCs and the Dusadh among the *Dalit* at the cost of the rest in their group are cases in point. Not only that, access to economic resources also determines and influences power and status and therefore those who have access to it are more likely to enjoy the benefit of 'social justice' than those who don't have it.

Social Justice and Political Conflict

In the practical sense social justice seemed to have become a euphemism for replacing one set of dominant castes over other. In the process a handful castes among the OBCs and *Dalit* experienced upward socio-economic mobility and political power while others still remained untouched and marginalized. Talking about Laloo Yadav's Backward Caste politics Robin (2009) observed:

“He has instrumentalised the Backward movement so that the main goal was not the elimination of caste discrimination but the coming to power by the instrumentalisation of this discrimination. The way Laloo Prasad reached power was indeed due to the mobilisation of caste through the 'backward' identity. The notion of social justice only corresponded to the removal of the upper caste from government in favour of the Backward Castes, mainly the Yadavs. Thus, the idea of social development was not contained in the concept of 'social justice'. Social justice meant the identity movement for the political upliftment of some Backward Castes.” (Robin, 2009: 97)

Inherent in political conflict of caste is the social and economic conflict that manifest in various forms. Thus, in a way, politics becomes both the means and medium of protest and resistance among the castes to achieve higher economic status, dominance, power and position. Socio-economic inequalities among castes have often led to

violent conflicts as described in earlier Chapters. The cleavages of socio-economic inequalities among castes acquired a political expression of conflict when castes asserted their rights given to them under the Indian Constitution. Castes participate in the power-politics process because the socio-economic discontents can be addressed through the political process. To an extent the political opportunity theory (Jenkins & Perrow 1977; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982 *et al.*) which is based on the basic assumption that the sources of discontent are inherent in all societies applies to the caste conflict as well. Conflict, if analyzed in the light of this theory is the function of political opportunities and constraints of the given political environment. Caste conflict therefore cannot only be seen as an outcome of the political environment, but also as a phenomenon which influences the political environment.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL GOOD

While analyzing the phenomenon of caste in the historical and caste-conflict in the contemporary perspective in the State of Bihar one inevitably has to deal with its socio-economic and political dimensions. The discussion would remain incomplete if the ensuing policy of affirmative action through reservation to ensure the upliftment of the oppressed and marginalized classes is not looked into. In this context one needs to evaluate how far the ongoing assertion and caste conflict have actually helped all sections of the society attain social justice and how far social justice itself has succeeded in delivering social good.

Caste as a phenomenon is an outcome of a long process of social evolution. It is a dynamic social phenomenon too and therefore caste keeps evolving in terms of function, relevance and utility. No theory pertaining to caste can convincingly pinpoint the reasons which have led to the emergence of this unique social phenomenon. Therefore, the phenomenon of caste can be better understood in the multiplicity of its religious-social-political and economic dimensions. Not only this, as against the popular perception caste is not a monolithic group nor is it so cohesive in nature that a single mantra of social justice can remove all their historical problems. The dynamics and diversity among castes in terms of sheer demography, socio-economic status, political empowerment, changing profession, besides the influence of modernization, sanskritization and economic changes in the society are such that it's difficult to ensure the equitable amount of social justice benefits to them all. In other words, dissatisfaction is likely to perpetuate.

Under the democratic system in the post-independence era castes in India have become much more organized, assertive and politicized. They defy the traditional rigidities of stratification, identity, social stigma and all kinds of discrimination and oppression, whether social, economic or political. As social groups castes are now much more conscious and assertive about their rights and can organize to safeguard their socio-political and economic interests. Consequently, the occurrences of inter-caste conflicts have become much more frequent and intense in the post-independence era in Bihar and in the rest of India.

As discussed earlier, caste conflict in Bihar emanates from three sources- social, economic and political. At the social level it emanates from traditional caste prejudices, assertion for caste identity, difference in status in the traditional hierarchy and lack of equal opportunity among others. On the economic level the causes of caste conflict primarily lie in economic oppression, lack of access to economic resources and income generation. Bihar primarily being an agrarian society, skewed landholding also contributes to caste conflict. Similarly, at the political level caste conflict is largely caused due to the fight for political representation and power sharing.

The causes of caste conflict in Bihar also lay in the oppression of the weaker castes by the dominant castes that control the economic resources and political power. Caste dominance now is not subject to the higher social status in the traditional hierarchy alone. The political intervention in the post-independence era has empowered the oppressed castes and helped them achieve higher socio-economic status. As a consequence, the traditional socio-political-economic hegemony of the four Upper Castes in Bihar is now diminishing and is being shared by the OBCs and SCs. It's evident in the rising political participation and representation of the OBCs and SCs in Bihar. However, caste groups do not have a monolithic characteristic. There are different factions within each caste group- OBCs, SCs and Upper Castes which come together to form new caste equations for political and economic gains. The emergence of new caste associations and federations characterizes the contemporary nature of caste politics of Bihar.

There are several factors leading to caste conflict viz. power, authority, dominance, status, hierarchy and oppression among others. Political intervention has helped castes mobilize for and against these issues in Bihar. As a result, castes have become politicized and are being used by the political parties as their captive target audience and vote bank. Caste and politics in Bihar have mingled to create nexus which thrives on creating new caste equations for political gains. The process is commonly known as 'social engineering' in the context of Bihar's caste politics. Since in a democracy number matters for political predominance and no single caste or caste group alone enjoys that strength, therefore castes and caste groups come together to form caste alliances or federations for political maneuvering.

In Bihar the undercurrents of caste conflict have been both tacit and violent in nature. There has been 'intra-caste group' conflict which involved castes of the same group and also 'inter-caste group conflict' which involved castes from different caste groups. Most of the violent conflicts in Bihar resulting in caste carnages and massacres have been 'inter-caste group' conflicts in which either the Upper Castes targeted the OBCs and SCs or the OBCs targeted the SCs or the SCs targeted the Upper Castes to protect their interest. However, there have also been numerous instances of tacit conflict within and among the caste groups for power sharing, political hegemony and for and against affirmative action ever since independence. As a result of caste conflicts and ensuing political interventions the status, hegemony, power and dominance of castes are being constantly redefined. The dominant castes for example are not the one who were slated high in the traditional ritual status, but those who now control political power and economic resources.

A sizeable portion of Bihar's political discourse deals with the socio-political and economic issues of caste politics. The discourse comprises issues of assertion for caste identity, creation of caste groups and federations, affirmative action and the policy of reservation, oppression of the weaker castes by the dominant castes, skewed landholding and land disputes, uprising of the landless poor and caste carnages and massacres among others.

The Marxists look at violent conflict and carnages in Bihar as 'class conflict' but in Bihar the 'class' and 'caste' distinction often becomes fuzzy. The dominant castes, irrespective of their ritual status in the caste hierarchy acquire the characteristics of the oppressor class. Similarly, the landless poor organize as a class to fight against the oppressors, but they identify them not as 'oppressing class' but as 'oppressing castes'. Hence, the carnages happen on caste lines. Therefore, violent conflicts in Bihar seem to have a 'class-caste' character. The constant occurrences of caste conflict of various nature also indicate the lack or shortage of social harmony causing hindrance to the development of the state on the socio-economic indices. It thus also makes the task of achieving social justice for all a tough call.

Although social justice is one of the fundamental doctrines of Indian constitution which implies justice for all irrespective of caste, creed or culture, nevertheless in Bihar it acquires a caste connotation. Social justice is also a much hyped political agenda in

Bihar which has led to frequent realignment of castes and caste groups for political and economic gains. The reiteration and assertion for social justice acquired centrestage more vociferously after the emergence of Laloo Yadav on Bihar's political scene and his becoming the chief minister of the State for the first time in 1990. Though he talked of the upliftment of the *garib-gurba* (poor and oppressed) through social justice but adopted a castiest agenda and deliberately kept the Upper Castes out of the purview of the benefits of social justice.

Laloo Yadav succeeded in instilling a sense of self-respect among the oppressed class of the OBCs and SCs and remained their undisputed leader for quite sometime, however, little did he do to create social harmony among various castes and caste groups so that social justice could prevail. His social justice eventually ended up in empowering the Yadav among the OBCs socio-politically while alienating rest of the OBCs and SCs besides the Upper Castes.

Though a good number of 47.5% respondents in the survey across all caste categories and political affiliations rated Nitish Kumar as the best chief minister for having implemented social justice most effectively, but he also did not make much effort to create a harmonious relation among the acrimonious castes and caste groups of Bihar. Though he expressed his willingness to pursue inclusive politics and bring all castes together (as discussed earlier) for achieving social justice for all, but Nitish Kumar also did not hesitate experimenting with his own caste-centric 'social engineering'. He discovered MBCs (Most Backward Classes) and *Mahadalit* for creating new caste equations which further factionalized the erstwhile caste groups of OBCs and SCs and thereby further strengthened the caste politics and caste-conflict in the State. Consequently in the survey data it is found that although 47.5% respondents feel that the idea behind creating new caste factions such as MBCs is inspired by the ideal of social justice, 32.1% respondents also see this step as politically motivated.

The caste demography of Bihar indicates that in each caste group there are large number of people who are socially and economically oppressed and politically underrepresented. Social justice should be directed to the socio-economic upliftment of the people belonging to the marginalized and oppressed class irrespective of their caste as indicated by 42.9% of the respondents in the survey who hold the opinion that economic backwardness should be the basis of implementing social justice. Further,

45.8% respondents feel that including the economically weak among all caste categories should be the precondition for implementing social justice.

However, social justice in Bihar remains the most asserted political agenda for the pursuance of factionalized and divisive politics. The political parties in Bihar identify the beneficiaries of social justice primarily on the basis of caste and the only tangible benefit which may be extended through social justice is caste-based reservation in government institutions and jobs which are negligible in number. Nevertheless, in the survey more than half, 52.1% respondents are of the opinion that even for implementing social justice through reservation, the criteria should be economic backwardness. This shows a difference of opinion between the OBCs leaders and OBCs respondents. While the earlier stick to their obstinacy to continue the social criterion for reservation, the latter is more accommodative and open to the economic criterion as well which may also help weaker sections among other castes. Therefore, it seems the issue of reservation is more political than social.

The series of organized violent caste conflicts as discussed has been a major stumbling block in the way of creating social harmony and achieving social justice in Bihar. Survey has indicated that the majority 35.0% respondents among all caste categories and political affiliations hold the view that the causes of organized violent caste conflicts rest in misuse of caste feelings. Political parties patronize and utilize the allegiance of castes and caste groups and thereby convert them into 'vote bank'. The survey data indicate that the overwhelming 62.9% respondents across all caste categories and political affiliations therefore also think that caste plays the role of a 'vote bank' in the present political context of Bihar. Political parties also indulge into the practice of 'divide and rule' which is the view of 38.3% respondents as indicated in the survey data which leads to caste conflict. Social justice in other words has become a political synonym for legitimizing caste and reservation politics and all the political parties are competing in this competitive enterprise. This lopsided approach to social justice fails to create a lasting and harmonious relationship among different castes and perpetuates further caste-conflict. It thus affirms the fact that that even today caste conflict is the biggest impediment in way of achieving social justice in Bihar.

THE OBITUARY OF CASTE POLITICS

“He alone could have found the way back to the causeway . . .

The Russian people were left floundering in the bog. Their worst misfortune was his birth . . . their next worst his death.”

(Winston Churchill on the death of Vladimir Lenin)

In a way using Churchill’s comments to draw an analogy between the people of Russia and the people of India may not look quite absurd as both of them faced double jeopardy of sorts. If the birth of Lenin was the worst misfortune of the Russians and his death the next worst as Churchill scathingly observed, for the people of India and Bihar the worst misfortune was caste being dragged into the realm of social justice politics and then being left rudderless following the death of the early stalwarts of social justice politics like Jai Prakash Narayan and Ram Manohar Lohia. Today caste conflict continues both in India and Bihar despite several socio-political interventions. From a social institution castes in Bihar are turning into disparate politically assertive groups which can easily organize to serve and safeguard their own narrow interest making the inter and intra-caste conflicts imminent.

For the convenience of micro-level analysis, caste conflict in Bihar is often analyzed on the social, economic and political dimensions separately. But they are more like reflection of the symptoms than the diagnosis of the disease itself. If India in the civilizational context was the melting pot of different cultures, Bihar acquired the dubious distinction of being another melting pot of sorts where caste oppression, violence, social injustice, corruption among other melted together to produce a strange residue which made the state sick and in the recent years acquire the identity of a *BIMARU* state. *BIMARU* an acronym is often used to refer to the economically weak and rather non-performing states including Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Incidentally, in Hindi it means ‘sickly’. Bihar became the victim of its legacy of caste oppression and injustice and the concubinage of socio-political conflict and violence. Caste being the basic unit of the social structure in the state, remained put at the centre of almost everything – oppression, politics, corruption, nepotism which

reduced the possibility of the state's development in the long run. Besides several other shortcomings in its social formation, the lack of visionary leadership also marred the overall performance of the state. There is no doubt that the deterioration in the leadership did not happen in a day; it was gradual and prolonged. However, the fact can't be ignored that the regime of Laloo Yadav (1990-2005) is decidedly uniquely placed in the political history of Bihar in the recent times. There is no doubt that he emerged as one of the most formidable leaders with huge popularity and following across the wide spectrum of the oppressed and backward castes and the minorities. He cultivated the image of a messiah of the poor and downtrodden and flaunted his rustic identity without any inhibition. In his initial years as chief minister he did things which were hitherto unthinkable for any chief minister.

Thakur (2000) observed that no chief minister of Bihar had ever raided liquor shops like a *hawaldar* and cancelled their licences on the spot. No chief minister of Bihar had ever stood in line at the Patna Medical College Hospital to get his fever-ridden son treated. At the same time, none of them had even gone about undoing style and structure established by a succession of predecessors as drastically and determinedly as Laloo Yadav did. Surely, there was also an element of political theatrics in his actions such as his initial insistence on operating from a two-room tenement allotted to his elder brother a peon in his own government or holding a cabinet meeting like a village Chaupal as Thakur (2000) pointed out. Regardless, his messages directly reached his audience – the oppressed and the marginalized and were always received by them with awe and huge admiration.

Laloo appeared charismatic, earthy and a subaltern political persona capturing the political centerstage with a vengeance against the symbols of Upper Castes feudal reminiscence. He was on a demolition spree, demolishing and uprooting the age old social foundations, systems and structures; both good and bad without putting a better substitute in place. He tried to cultivate the pro-oppressed or pro-proletariat image for himself and for a long time people believed in his sincerity of purpose.

It's also a fact that in the initial years of his rule he was almost unopposed and invincible till he was trapped in the multi-million fodder scam. Laloo Yadav made social justice a clichéd political rhetoric which he used at all possible forums to reassure

his political audience about his concern for their wellbeing and upliftment. The post-Mandal political dynamics gave him unprecedented power but the power did not give him the wherewithal or vision to use it for larger social good. He apparently did not realize that if planned and executed sincerely, social justice could have rendered great help to the much needed socio-economic restructuring of Bihar. His obsession with caste-centric social justice which later got much reduced in its scope and then largely confined to his own castemen and family members, rendered the whole spirit of social justice meaningless in its homeground Bihar. What followed in the state was the shocking spectacle of shattering indices of social security, development, economic performance and governance. Rampant corruption, break down of law and order machinery, abductions characterized the fifteen year regime of Laloo Yadav which his political opponent dubbed as *jungle raj* (rule of jungle). Long (2004) observed in the Economist:

“Bihar... has become a byword for the worst of India: of widespread and inescapable poverty; of corrupt politicians indistinguishable from the mafia dons they patronise; of a caste-ridden social order that has retained the worst feudal cruelties; of terrorist attacks by groups of Naxalite Maoists; of chronic misrule that has allowed infrastructure to crumble, the education and health systems to collapse, and law and order to evaporate... Much of the blame for Bihar’s poor performance is laid at the door of Laloo Prasad Yadav, who was the state’s chief minister from 1990 to 1997. Jailed for his alleged involvement in a huge corruption scandal, he rules through his wife, Rabri Devi.”
(Long, February 19, 2004)

Laloo Yadav allowed the state to slip into oblivion. During his regime vacancies in the government were often not filled not because there were no qualified men around but because of the fear that the process may allow the resurgence of the Upper Castes who will occupy these positions and spoil his political gameplans. Its reflection on the system of administration was obvious. Another important fact about Bihar is that due to the lack of sustained economic development, Bihar largely remained an agrarian society in the era of industrialization. As such, its rootedness in caste system became quite pronounced as compared to the other industrial and cosmopolitan states. Leaders like

Laloo Yadav knew it well and thus deliberately created paranoia among the poor and oppressed against the issues of development. Nitish Kumar who first came to power in 2005 in his first attempt tried to break Laloo Yadav's caste equation and in his second tenure looked more positive and gave the agenda of development the centrality in governance. It was a daring bold step in a caste ridden state like Bihar. It caught the imagination of the development starved people of Bihar across the whole spectrum of castes who decided to return Nitish Kumar in the 2010 assembly elections with a thumping majority.

Nobody can predict the exact number of seats a political party can win or lose in elections. Even the psephologists largely succeed in predicting the trends. If trends and mood was an indicator, the results of Bihar Assembly elections were on the expected lines. The 2010 Assembly elections which returned the Janata Dal United (JDU) and Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) with an overwhelming majority of 206 seats out of the total 243 under the leadership of Nitish Kumar was a reflection of people's preference for development over caste and communal agenda of the RJD regime.

Those who were watching the socio-political developments in Bihar not just before the 2010 elections but ever since the Nitish Kumar and Sushil Modi led government was voted to power in 2005, found their observation being vindicated than feeling surprised. The reason was simple; the agenda of development in a development deficit state could not have been ignored for long particularly in the era of intense and real-time connectivity with the rest of the world. Migration was no solution for the people, the solution was development and opportunity at the doorstep; at least the little semblance of its beginning. The issues of *Sadak-Suraksha-Bijli-Pani* (Road-Security-Electricity-Water) have become metaphors of development politics in India of late. However, in Bihar, both the political class and people took some time to realize the importance of development oriented 'inclusive politics' as against caste-centric politics in the guise of the proverbial 'social justice'.

But what was the message of the 2010 mandate in Bihar? Was it a pro-incumbency mandate for a pro-development agenda, an outright rejection of Laloo Yadav brand of 'social justice' politics, or a mandate for evolving a new model of development shunning caste and communal politics? Some political analysts even indicated that

should the BJP want to repeat its Bihar performance in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections it may consider promoting the Bihar model of 'soft Hindutva' and development as against the Gujarat (one of India's western and most prosperous states) model of 'aggressive Hindutva' and development. Some Muslim votes which went to the BJP were attributed to the appeal of Nitish Kumar among minorities by some political analysts more than BJP's matured and measured stance on the Ayodhya verdict which coincided with the period of election. The NDA in Bihar was a strange combination of dichotomous ideologies. One partner stood opposed to pseudo-secularism, other opposed to a kind of caste politics led by a particular caste and its nexus with minorities. Both had different and even conflicting constituencies to address. But when they joined hands, one sought to cultivate a 'secular identity' other tried to project 'inclusive politics' providing space to people belonging to all caste categories in politics and governance not by courtesy, but rightfully. Perhaps nothing could have worked as a better cohesive factor than the agenda of development. It no doubt strengthened the coalition. However, those who are familiar with the politics of Bihar understand that as compared to communal conflict, caste conflict has been a major issue in Bihar

In the decade of nineties Bihar launched subaltern political heroes in Bihar like Laloo Yadav and Nitish Kumar. They hailed from similar social background, worked from the same political plank at one point of time and even championed same political agenda of social justice in the post-Mandal era. However, in due course of time they not only fell apart but also became arch rivals.

The beginning of Nitish Kumar's first political inning as chief minister in the year 2000 was rather disappointing on two major grounds. First that he succumbed to the same forces who he blamed to have criminalized Bihar's politics and turned it into the proverbial *jungle raj* when it came to ensure his own chiefministership. His move to seek support of Surajbhan Singh a Bhumihaar warlord and other politicians with well-known criminal antecedents was looked at as the worst example of political opportunism during his first and the shortest seven day stint as Bihar's chief minister in 2000. The second disappointment was on account of the desperation that he showed to become the chief minister when he did not have the required numbers.

A successor is almost always measured in the yardstick of his predecessor, more particularly, when the predecessor has left some inimitable impression on the social psyche. Nitish's style of politics and governance is always pitched against that of his predecessor Laloo Yadav. Both the leaders are compared on the yardstick of honesty, sincerity, efficiency, vision and in terms of their ability to mould the realpolitik of Bihar. When it came to popularity and mass appeal Nitish was certainly not as lucky as Laloo Yadav used to be in his initial days. Laloo had an identity of an earthy and somewhat unrefined populist politician endowed with an uncanny sense of reading people's pulse. Some of it was cultivated while some part of his persona. His populist flamboyance and scathing diatribes against his opponents made him the most popular subaltern political posterboy of the media as well. Nitish on the other hand chose to be different. He played lesser political gimmicks and wore a sober public face acceptable not only to the internal but also external audience watching his moves curiously. However, this doesn't mean Nitish is a novice in the game of politics.

Laloo and Nitish jointly wrote the political script of the Mandal strategy and vociferously supported the Mandal movement which ensured the socio-political mainstreaming of the OBCs in Bihar. But when Laloo emerged as the sole leader of the OBCs, SCs and even minorities whose insecurity phobia he not only nurtured but also encashed for long time, Nitish counteracted this with his own ingenious social engineering. He made Laloo Yadav's formidable MY (Muslim-Yadav) combination rather ineffective by supporting the cause of the upliftment of the MBCs on the one hand and sending olive branch to the Upper Castes directly and by aligning with the BJP in Bihar. No doubt, he also encashed the simmering discontent among the Kurmis, Koeris and OBCs against Laloo's Yadav fixation.

Nitish Kumar stressed that Mandal did empower some castes (by 'some' perhaps he meant Yadavs more than any other among the OBCs) but that shouldn't have legitimized the breakdown of the rule of law during Laloo regime. He introduced 20% reservation for the MBCs whose number exceed 100 but are but are too fragmented and little to stand the might of the dominant OBCs namely the Yadav, Kurmi (his own caste), Koeri and Bania. Together they form a large chunk in terms of sheer number. It was another social justice in making which no righteous champion of social justice could dare oppose. In the same manner he created a new caste group called *Mahadalit*

and very sneakily removed the members of the Chamar and Dusadh (Paswan) community from this new category.

Nitish's act was like hitting two birds with one stone. In the guise of extending social justice to the weakest castes among the *Dalit* community which he called *Mahadalit* there was also a shrewd political move to cut his another arch rival Ramvilas Paswan to size who is considered the undisputed leader of the Paswan in Bihar. This caused a further rift among the SCs or *Dalit* as a caste group. Ramvilas called it discriminating and a dirty politics to divide the *Dalit*. Among the Upper Castes he is considered leaning more towards the Bhumihar who were in the line of fire during Laloo era.

Nitish Kumar like his predecessor Laloo Yadav is also acutely aware of the delicate caste equation in Bihar and the electoral advantage of social justice and the so called secular politics. So he also tries the same time tested caste and secular formula albeit with his own recipe of caste ingredients. To prove his secular credentials Nitish like his arch rival Laloo Yadav, too doesn't miss any opportunity. For example, after becoming the chief minister, he announced to reopen the Bhagalpur communal riot case which was closed by the Laloo-Rabri government and which the people of Bihar – both Hindu and Muslim had nearly forgotten. It's interesting to note that the 1989 Bhagalpur riot had many Yadav involved in the acts of violence. One of the accused Kameshwar Yadav was even felicitated by the RJD government for his remarkable contributions towards "maintaining peace and harmony in society". Later he was awarded life sentence by the court. It was obviously difficult for the Laloo-Rabri regime to destabilize their government by speeding up action against their main Yadav constituency. Urdu newspapers, most of them nondescript, are flourishing in Bihar receiving government support and advertisement. To woo the Muslims Nitish even sent two backward caste (*Pasmanda*) Muslims to Rajya Sabha.

Nitish snubbed the BJP Hindutva posterboy and one of the tallest leaders Narendra Modi the chief minister of Gujarat by returning the relief cheque sent by Modi government towards Kosi flood relief fund on a rather flimsy ground. Modi was not even allowed to campaign for the BJP-JDU alliance in the 2010 assembly elections. The biggest embarrassment came to the BJP when he cancelled the dinner hosted in the

honour of Narendra Modi when he visited Bihar to attend the BJP-JDU victory celebration post 2010 assembly elections.

By such actions Nitish tried sending message both to the minority community and to his political opponents like Laloo Yadav, Ramvilas Paswan and the Congress Party. While he tried to establish his secular credentials among the minorities on the one hand, he also sought to demonstrate it by daring and snubbing Narendra Modi even at the cost of inviting BJP's displeasure. May be, he considered his act equal to his opponent Laloo Yadav's act of stopping LK Advani's Rath Yatra in Bihar and arresting him which gave him a huge political mileage and the image of the stalwart of secular politics in India.

However, following his landslide victory in the 2010 assembly elections development and inclusive politics have acquired centerstage in Nitish's politics. Regardless, his political opponents in Bihar still believe that in comparative terms while Laloo destroyed the state laughing aloud, Nitish is destroying it smilingly and gently. However, as far as the people of Bihar are concerned, if they appreciate Nitish for one thing and willing to condone his underlying caste and communal politics, it's the fact that he has ensured the most sought after basic need of the people of the state- safety and security after years of lawlessness and anarchy.

On personal level, Nitish Kumar so far carries the image of a 'clean' politician who also seems to be sincere and hard working and one who is apparently trying to pull the state out of the mess of non-governance, inefficiency and rampant corruption which his predecessor left behind as the political legacy. One may disagree with his policies and programmes somewhat but not as much with his intentions to deliver good governance and bring the derailed state back on the track.

Does this overwhelming mandate to the JDU-BJP government in Bihar mean that caste ceased to play a decisive role in the state's politics? The fact remains that over a decade Bihar has witnessed the rise of OBCs assertion and politics. The biggest contribution of Laloo Yadav was to organize them as a consolidated vote bank along with the SCs and minorities. But Nitish Kumar's social engineering succeeded in creating an alternative axis of OBCs politics with a much lesser caste overtone and a message of willingness to do 'inclusive politics' which had scope for every caste group.

The Upper Castes were politically marginalized during the RJD tenure. The emergence of BJP revived their hope of political comeback by making an alliance with JDU. So it enjoyed a clear and large support of the Upper Castes particularly in the urban areas in this election. A strong Congress could have made a dent in the BJP Upper Castes vote bank. But that didn't happen in the 2010 assembly elections in Bihar. The RJD-LJP combine also tried to consolidate its votes on caste and religion equation of OBCs, SCs and minorities in the state. Obviously that effort was also rejected by the people outright. The JDU-BJP combine on the other hand countered this RJD-LJP combination with its *Ati-Pichhada*, *Maha-Dalit* and Upper Castes consolidation which proved far more rewarding in electoral terms.

Looking at the new caste equations and their continuing centrality in Bihar's politics one can't believe that the people of Bihar have written the obituary of caste politics in the state. Perhaps it will be too early to endorse this notion. Development is a genuine concern of the people no doubt, but it may be a temporary euphoria as well. Even today caste is a deep rooted socio-political reality in the state and the first constituency for any political party or leader which they can't afford to ignore. The discernable difference in the mandate of the 2010 assembly elections was that the castes and communities which were branded as 'vote banks' of a certain political party due to their consolidated voting habit, had broken off their 'vote bank' identity and reposed their faith in the alternative leadership.

Bihar still has a large number of marginalized population which requires social-economic and political upliftment. But the problem with Bihar's caste endemic politics is that it's always compelled to see the causes of marginalization and impoverishment from the perspective of caste. If the mandate of 2010 elections was for development the ruling coalition will have to show the wherewithal to set itself free from following a caste-centric development agenda. Development mandate has its own risks in Bihar. If the benefits of development do not reach the poor and needy at the grassroot level in visible manner, there may be a resurgence of the pseudo 'social justice' politics.

Much will depend on how successfully the coalition strikes a balance between the conflicting caste interests and the imperatives of development. It will be too radical to

imagine that the agenda of development can render caste politics completely irrelevant in Bihar. The only way to control it will be to strengthen the new phase of 'inclusive politics' in the state which is the message of the 2010 mandate. In other words the larger purpose of the mandate is to strengthen caste cohesion for social development rather than perpetuating anarchy and caste conflict for shortsighted political gains.

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APPENDICES & ANNEXURES

Appendix 1

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This book presents a phenomenological study based on the review of existing caste conflict studies and analysis of first hand empirical qualitative and quantitative study carried out in Bihar. It involves in-depth discourse and content analysis of the available literature on caste politics in India in general and the state of Bihar in particular through secondary data literature review. The book is based on the qualitative discourse and content analysis of the academic and journalistic writings on the issues of caste politics and caste conflict in Bihar interspersed with the quantitative analysis of the survey data collected in Bihar during 2010.

Sampling

Given the nature of the study it was felt that only selected and known respondents could be interviewed. Hence, a purposive sampling was drawn confined to specific type of respondents who could provide the desired information within the defined parameters. Accordingly, only adults within the age group of 18-65 years were selected having some education. Since the study relates to caste conflict, only Hindu respondents as far as possible were selected. In order to limit the scope of the study respondents living in and around the city of Patna of either gender were interviewed.

Approximately 300 persons belonging to the three aforesaid caste categories were approached for the survey conducted during May-June 2010. 275 forms were filled by the respondents out of which 240 were found complete in all respect.

Interview Schedule

In order to gather opinion of a large number of persons in Bihar, survey was considered most appropriate method of data collection covering different strata of urban respondents. Hence, a survey questionnaire was prepared for data collection. To testify the validity of the discourse a quantitative analysis was done based on the data collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed on the basis of the discourse and literature review. While preparing it following issues were kept in mind: a) the wordings of the questions b) identification of the issues and c) the target respondents. The appropriateness of the wordings of the questions, the levels of the sophistication of the language, the sequencing of the questions and the manner of seeking personal data

with regard to income, caste or *jati* and political affiliation were kept in mind while preparing the questionnaire. After preparing the questionnaire it was sent to experts for their opinion and having incorporated the necessary changes such as reduction in the total number of questions and eliminating similar nature of questions among others, the questionnaire was pre-tested. Initially there were 25 questions in the questionnaire which after the pretesting were reduced to 20 questions each having four to five different options including ‘can’t say’ as the last option. Since the survey was to be conducted in the Hindi speaking state of Bihar and among the cross section of the society with varied level of language proficiency, it was decided to prepare the questionnaire in spoken Hindi.

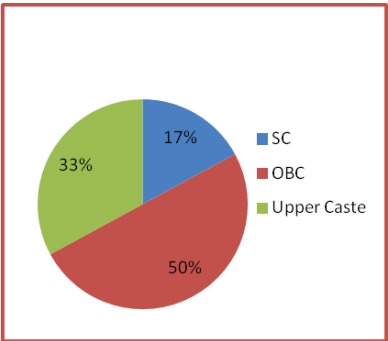
Data Collection

The primary data in this study is based on personal interaction, first-hand interview of social and political workers, journalists, academicians, students and common man. For this purpose an interview was conducted among the three caste categories namely the *Dalit*, the Other Backward Classes and the Upper Castes representing the cross section of Bihar. The survey was conducted through personally administered questionnaire. The sample was divided into three caste or *jati* categories namely the *Dalit* (Scheduled Castes), the OBCs (Other Backward Classes) and the remaining referred to as “Upper Castes.”

Annexure 1

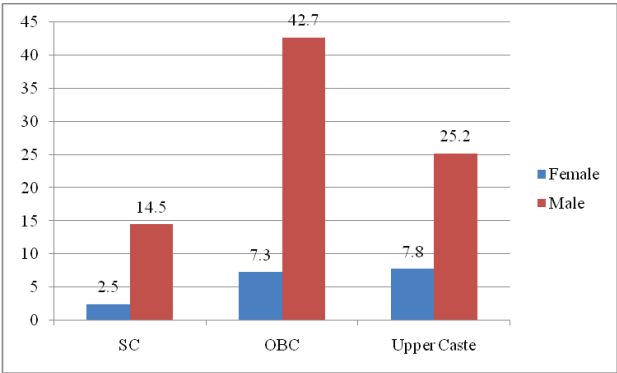
Demographic Details

a. Caste Categories of Total Respondents



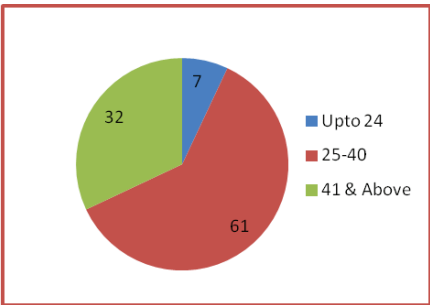
The final sample as indicated in Annexure 1a. includes 120 OBC respondents (50%), 79 Upper Caste respondents (33%) and 41 *Dalit* respondents (17%).

b. Gender Bifurcation



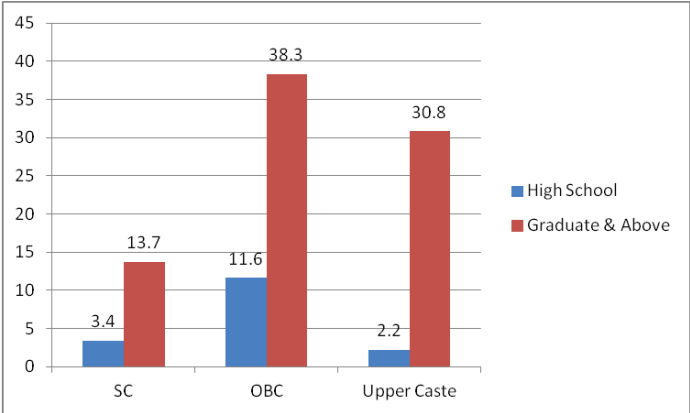
Annexure 1b. depicts that among the total respondents there were 200 male (88.3%) and 40 female (16.7%). Of the total sample size the male respondents in the OBC category were 42.7% while the female in the same were 7.3%. The Upper Caste male and female respondents were 25.2% and 7.8% respectively. The SC male and female respondents were 14.5% and 2.5% of the total sample size.

c. Aggregate Age of Respondents



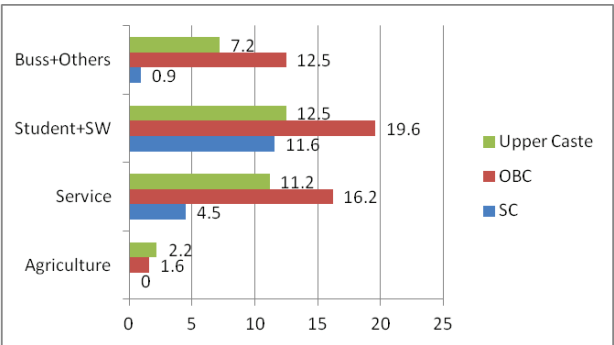
As depicted in Annexure 1c. maximum respondents (61%) including all caste categories were in the age group of 25-40 years. Below this (32%) were respondents in the age group of 18-40 years. There were only 7% respondents in the age group of 41-65 years.

d. Educational Bifurcations by Caste Categories



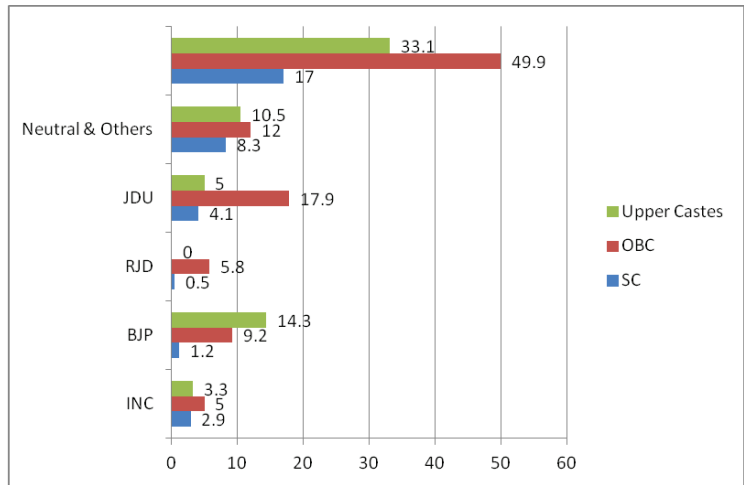
Annexure 1d. indicates that out of total 240 respondents, for Graduates and above the bifurcation was: SC-13.7%, OBC 38.3% and Upper Caste 30.8%. Similarly, for High School educated the caste bifurcation was: SC- 3.4%, OBC- 11.6% and Upper Caste 2.2%.

e. Occupation among the three Caste Categories



Annexure 1e. presents the occupational details of the three caste categories. Among the three caste categories students and social workers ranked the highest with a cumulative 43.7%. It was followed by the service sector with 31.9%. Respondents belonging to business and other professions in the three caste categories comprised of 20.6%. Those having agriculture as their profession were 3.8%.

f. Political Affiliation



Out of the total sample size of 240, maximum respondents 30.8% (Upper Castes 10.5%, OBCs 12%, SCs 8.33%) among the three caste categories were politically neutral. Among the three caste categories the highest 27% (Upper Castes 5%, OBCs 17.9%, SCs 4.1%) respondents were affiliated to JDU. It was followed by 24.7% (Upper Castes 14.3%, OBCs 9.2%, SCs 1.2%) affiliated to BJP. There were 11.24% respondents affiliated to INC which included 3.3%, Upper Castes, 5% OBCs and 2.9% SCs. There was no respondent among the Upper Castes affiliated to RJD, while among OBCs 5.8% and SCs 0.5% were affiliated to RJD.

The sample profile of the respondents that emerges at a broader level reflects Bihar’s caste composition and political affiliation in which numerically OBCs are highest in proportion, followed by SCs and Upper Castes. The current political affiliation of the respondents reflects the general representation of each party more or less as it is in the

Bihar Vidhan Sabha. Though the individual membership may not truly reflect the composition of the respondents in the sample.

Annexure 2. Exploitation of the Castes by the Castes

Exploitation of the Castes by the Castes		UCs Exploiting OBCs-SCs	OBCs Exploiting UCs and SCs	Using Castes as per Pol. Relevance	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	29.3	2.4	65.9	2.4	41
	OBCs	25.0	5.8	65.8	3.3	120
	UCs	7.6	3.8	84.8	3.8	79
Political Party	INC	33.3	3.7	55.6	7.4	27
	BJP	6.8	6.8	81.4	5.1	59
	RJD	33.3	0.0	66.7	0.0	15
	JDU	26.2	9.2	64.6	0.0	65
	Neu+Oth	17.6	0.0	78.4	4.1	74
Total		20.0	4.6	72.1	3.3	240

Annexure 3. Rationale Behind Creating EBC Group

Rationale Behind Creating EBC Group		Political Motivation	Social Justice	Admn. Necessity	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	17.1	63.4	9.8	9.8	41
	OBCs	30.8	46.7	12.5	10.0	120
	UCs	41.8	40.5	5.1	12.7	79
Political Party	INC	7.4	51.9	18.5	22.2	27
	BJP	30.5	47.5	8.5	13.6	59
	RJD	46.7	33.3	20.0	0.0	15
	JDU	27.7	56.9	7.7	7.7	65
	Neu+Oth	43.2	40.5	6.8	9.5	74
Total		32.1	47.5	9.6	10.8	240

Annexure 4. Political Motive Behind Creating Caste Equation

Political Motive Behind Creating Caste Equation		Using Caste as Vote Bank	Enhance Social Harmony	Holding Power	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	29.3	9.8	58.5	2.4	41
	OBCs	42.5	12.5	38.3	6.7	120
	UCs	45.6	12.7	40.5	1.3	79
Political Party	INC	48.1	18.5	33.3	0.0	27
	BJP	40.7	8.5	45.8	5.1	59
	RJD	33.3	20.0	40.0	6.7	15
	JDU	40.0	16.9	40.0	3.1	65
	Neu+Oth	41.9	6.8	45.9	5.4	74
Total		41.3	12.1	42.5	4.2	240

Annexure 5. Role of Caste in the Present Context

Role of Caste in the Present Context		Vote Bank	Organization of Econ. Interest	Source of Socio-pol. Consc.	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	46.3	9.8	36.6	7.3	41
	OBCs	60.0	17.5	18.3	4.2	120
	UCs	75.9	5.1	13.9	5.1	79
Political Party	INC	74.1	7.4	14.8	3.7	27
	BJP	61.0	15.3	15.3	8.5	59
	RJD	53.3	33.3	13.3	0.0	15
	JDU	58.5	10.8	27.7	3.1	65
	Neu+Oth	66.2	8.1	20.3	5.4	74
Total		62.9	12.1	20.0	5.0	240

Annexure 6. Castes Benefitted Most from Social Justice

Castes Benefitted Most from Social Justice			Dominant OBCs	SCs	Dominant SCs	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	14.6	31.7	19.5	17.1	17.1	41
	OBCs	28.3	25.8	10.8	20.8	14.2	120
	UCs	21.5	44.3	12.7	8.9	12.7	79
Political Party	INC	25.9	22.2	25.9	7.4	18.5	27
	BJP	37.3	28.8	13.6	10.2	10.2	59
	RJD	26.7	20.0	0.0	33.3	20.0	15
	JDU	20.0	38.5	13.8	16.9	10.8	65
	Neu+Oth	14.9	37.8	9.5	20.3	17.6	74
Total		23.8	32.9	12.9	16.3	14.2	240

Annexure7. Main Cause of Caste Conflict

Main Cause of caste Conflict		Socio-economic Disparity	Power and Political Interest	Dominating Resources	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	48.8	34.1	7.3	9.8	41
	OBCs	32.5	40.8	21.7	5.0	120
	UCs	39.2	46.8	11.4	2.5	79
Political Party	INC	44.4	40.7	14.8	0.0	27
	BJP	25.4	45.8	22.0	6.8	59
	RJD	40.0	46.7	13.3	0.0	15
	JDU	43.1	36.9	15.4	4.6	65
	Neu+Oth	39.2	41.9	12.2	6.8	74
Total		37.5	41.7	15.8	5.0	240

Annexure 8. Causes of Organized Caste Conflict

Causes of Organized Caste Conflict		Economic and Skewed Land	Misuse of Caste Feelings	Self-respect and Econ. Consc.	Pol. Consc. of SCs-OBCs	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	31.7	17.1	24.4	24.4	2.4	41
	OBCs	21.7	39.2	15.0	18.3	5.8	120
	UCs	30.4	38.0	8.9	13.9	8.9	79
Political Party	INC	25.9	33.3	7.4	25.9	7.4	27
	BJP	20.3	44.1	15.3	13.6	6.8	59
	RJD	20.0	33.3	33.3	13.3	0.0	15
	JDU	29.2	36.9	13.8	13.8	6.2	65
	Neu+Oth	29.7	27.0	13.5	23.0	6.8	74
Total		26.3	35.0	14.6	17.9	6.3	240

Annexure 9. Views on Social Justice

Views on Social Justice		Not Without Social Harmony	Tool of Caste Politics	Basis of Social Development	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	31.7	17.1	51.2	0.0	41
	OBCs	32.5	15.8	45.8	5.8	120
	UCs	45.6	11.4	41.8	1.3	79
Political Party	INC	48.1	7.4	44.4	0.0	27
	BJP	45.8	18.6	33.9	1.7	59
	RJD	33.3	6.7	53.3	6.7	15
	JDU	32.3	13.8	50.8	3.1	65
	Neu+Oth	29.7	16.2	48.6	5.4	74
Total		36.7	14.6	45.4	3.3	240

Annexure 10. Modification in the Policy of Reservation

Modification in the Policy of Reservation		Can't be Modified	Economic Basis	Removing Creamy Layer	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	51.2	29.3	7.3	12.2	41
	OBCs	14.2	55.0	20.0	10.8	120
	UCs	2.5	59.5	29.1	8.9	79
Political Party	INC	14.8	59.3	14.8	11.1	27
	BJP	5.1	52.5	27.1	15.3	59
	RJD	33.3	33.3	33.3	0.0	15
	JDU	23.1	47.7	21.5	7.7	65
	Neu+Oth	17.6	56.8	14.9	10.8	74
Total		16.7	52.1	20.8	10.4	240

Annexure 11. Role of Reservation in Social Justice

Role of Reservation in Social Justice		Medium of SJ	Removing Disparity	Inclusive Role	Benefit to Dominant	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	7.3	26.8	56.1	7.3	2.4	41
	OBCs	10.0	25.8	48.3	5.0	10.8	120
	UCs	12.7	26.6	31.6	17.7	11.4	79
Political Party	INC	14.8	22.2	40.7	7.4	14.8	27
	BJP	8.5	22.0	40.7	15.3	13.6	59
	RJD	0.0	40.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	15
	JDU	15.4	23.1	49.2	6.2	6.2	65
	Neu+Oth	8.1	31.1	40.5	10.8	9.5	74
Total		10.4	26.3	44.2	9.6	9.6	240

Annexure 12. Pre-Condition for Implementing Social Justice

Pre-Condition for Implementing Social Justice		Social Harmony	Removing Caste Prejudice	Including Economically weak	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	12.2	24.4	63.4	0.0	41
	OBCs	30.0	30.0	38.3	1.7	120
	UCs	31.6	16.5	48.1	3.8	79
Political Party	INC	14.8	22.2	59.3	3.7	27
	BJP	30.5	23.7	44.1	1.7	59
	RJD	33.3	33.3	33.3	0.0	15
	JDU	30.8	26.2	43.1	0.0	65
	Neu+Oth	25.7	23.0	47.3	4.1	74
Total		27.5	24.6	45.8	2.1	240

Annexure 13. CM who Implemented Social Justice Most Effectively

CM who Implemented Social Justice Most Effectively		Karpoori Thakur	Dr. Jagannath Mishra	Laloo Yadav	Nitish Kumar	K B Sahay	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	14.6	0.0	26.8	51.2	0.0	7.3	41
	OBCs	20.8	3.3	10.8	50.8	0.8	13.3	120
	UCs	12.7	6.3	2.5	40.5	3.8	34.2	79
Political Party	INC	25.9	0.0	25.9	33.3	7.4	7.4	27
	BJP	11.9	3.4	5.1	59.3	1.7	18.6	59
	RJD	20.0	6.7	20.0	46.7	0.0	6.7	15
	JDU	13.8	3.1	6.2	66.2	1.5	9.2	65
	Neu+Oth	20.3	5.4	12.2	27.0	0.0	35.1	74
Total		17.1	3.8	10.8	47.5	1.7	19.2	240

Annexure 14. Causes of Assertion for Caste Identity

Causes of Assertion for Caste Identity		Higher Status	Political Dominance	Econ. and Pol. Interest	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	14.6	22.0	58.5	4.9	41
	OBCs	17.5	39.2	38.3	5.0	120
	UCs	12.7	38.0	46.8	2.5	79
Political Party	INC	18.5	33.3	37.0	11.1	27
	BJP	16.9	42.4	37.3	3.4	59
	RJD	26.7	26.7	46.7	0.0	15
	JDU	12.3	27.7	55.4	4.6	65
	Neu+Oth	13.5	40.5	43.2	2.7	74
Total		15.4	35.8	44.6	4.2	240

Annexure 15. Causes of Intermittent Caste Violence

Causes of Intermittent Caste Violence		Traditional Upper Caste Prejudice	Growing Political Consciousness	Exploitation by Dominant OBCs	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	36.6	34.1	29.3	0.0	41
	OBCs	26.7	36.7	27.5	9.2	120
	UCs	20.3	39.2	26.6	13.9	79
Political Party	INC	18.5	48.1	29.6	3.7	27
	BJP	22.0	28.8	32.2	16.9	59
	RJD	26.7	40.0	33.3	0.0	15
	JDU	32.3	35.4	27.7	4.6	65
	Neu+Oth	27.0	40.5	21.6	10.8	74
Total		26.3	37.1	27.5	9.2	240

Annexure 16. Causes of Violent Land Conflict

Causes of Violent Land Conflict		Caste Hegemony	Economic Hegemony	Feudal and Leftist Conflict	Insecurity among Upper Caste	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	24.4	14.6	48.8	7.3	4.9	41
	OBCs	29.2	15.8	38.3	8.3	8.3	120
	UCs	29.1	16.5	29.1	20.3	5.1	79
Political Party	INC	25.9	18.5	40.7	14.8	0.0	27
	BJP	27.1	16.9	37.3	10.2	8.5	59
	RJD	60.0	13.3	6.7	13.3	6.7	15
	JDU	30.8	16.9	35.4	7.7	9.2	65
	Neu+Oth	21.6	13.5	43.2	16.2	5.4	74
Total		28.3	15.8	37.1	12.1	6.7	240

Annexure 17. Causes of Bihar's Economic Backwardness

Causes of Bihar's Economic Backwardness		Lack of Industrial Policy and Pol. Will	Lack of Econ. Resources and Infrastructure	Caste Conflict and Violence	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	43.9	31.7	19.5	4.9	41
	OBCs	37.5	32.5	25.0	5.0	120
	UCs	51.9	27.8	17.7	2.5	79
Political Party	INC	51.9	25.9	18.5	3.7	27
	BJP	33.9	32.2	27.1	6.8	59
	RJD	40.0	26.7	33.3	0.0	15
	JDU	40.0	38.5	18.5	3.1	65
	Neu+Oth	51.4	25.7	18.9	4.1	74
Total		43.3	30.8	21.7	4.2	240

Annexure 18. Impact of Caste and Politics Nexus

Impact of Caste and Politics Nexus		Empowerment and Respect to SCs-OBCs	New Caste Equation	Social Harmony	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	36.6	31.7	17.1	14.6	41
	OBCs	30.8	41.7	17.5	10.0	120
	UCs	17.7	60.8	15.2	6.3	79
Political Party	INC	18.5	55.6	7.4	18.5	27
	BJP	18.6	50.8	22.0	8.5	59
	RJD	46.7	26.7	20.0	6.7	15
	JDU	40.0	36.9	15.4	7.7	65
	Neu+Oth	23.0	51.4	16.2	9.5	74
Total		27.5	46.3	16.7	9.6	240

Annexure 19. Views on the Role of Caste Politics in Bihar

Views on the Role of Caste Politics in Bihar		Socio-econ. Interest	Divide and Rule	Political Purpose	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	34.1	22.0	41.5	2.4	41
	OBCs	21.7	37.5	35.8	5.0	120
	UCs	11.4	48.1	36.7	3.8	79
Political Party	INC	18.5	44.4	33.3	3.7	27
	BJP	16.9	49.2	25.4	8.5	59
	RJD	33.3	40.0	20.0	6.7	15
	JDU	27.7	27.7	44.6	0.0	65
	Neu+Oth	14.9	36.5	44.6	4.1	74
Total		20.4	38.3	37.1	4.2	240

Annexure 20. Impact of Caste Conflict on Society and Politics

Impact of Caste Conflict on Society and Politics		Distance Increased	OBCs-SCs Enjoying Rights	Dominant OBCs Prevailing	Can't Say	Total N
Caste	SCs	24.4	63.4	12.2	0.0	41
	OBCs	28.3	54.2	13.3	4.2	120
	UCs	46.8	30.4	19.0	3.8	79
Political Party	INC	33.3	44.4	18.5	3.7	27
	BJP	39.0	37.3	22.0	1.7	59
	RJD	26.7	53.3	20.0	0.0	15
	JDU	24.6	64.6	7.7	3.1	65
	Neu+Oth	39.2	41.9	13.5	5.4	74
Total		33.8	47.9	15.0	3.3	240

Appendix 2

CENTRAL LIST OF OTHER BACKWARD CLASSES

Sl.No.	Name of the Castes/Sub-castes/Synonyms/	Entry No. in the
	Communities	Central List
BIHAR		
1	Abdal	1
2	Agariya	2
3	Aghori	3
4	Amaat	4
5	Bagdi	77
6	Bakho (Muslim)	130
7	Banpar	113
8	Barai	82
9	Barhai (Viswakarma)	81
10	Bari	78
11	Beldar	79
12	Bhar	85
13	Bhaskar	86
14	Bhat, Bhatt	88
15	Bhathiara (Muslim)	84
16	Bind	80
17	Bhuihar, Bhuiyar	87
18	Chain, Chayeen	39
19	Chapota	40
20	Chandrabanshi (Kahar)	41
21	Chanou	43
22	Chik (Muslim)	38
23	Christian converts from	121
24	Christian converts from Scheduled Castes	120
25	Churihar (Muslim)	42
26	Dafali (Muslim)	46
27	Dangi	123

28	Devhar	55
29	Dhamin	59
30	Dhanuk	56
31	Dhanwar	122
32	Dhankar	60
33	Dhekaru	47
34	Dhimar	61
35	Dhobi (Muslim)	57
36	Dhunia (Muslim)	58
37	Gaddi	30
38	Gandarbh or Gandharb	31
39	Gangai (Ganesh)	32
40	Gangota, Gangoth	33
41	Ghatwar	37
42	Godi (Chhava)	29
43	Gorh, Gonrh (only in the district of Saran & Rohtas)	34
44	Goud	36
45	Gulgaliya	35
46	Idrisi or Darzi (Muslim)	119
47	Jogi (Jugi)	44
48	Kadar	7
49	Kaivartta/Kaibartta	8
50	Kagzi	16
51	Kalandar	9
52	Kalwar	124(a)
	Kalal, Eraqui	124(b)
53	Kamar (Lohar, Karmakar, Visvakarma)	18
54	Kanu	17
55	Kapadia	20
56	Kasab (Kasai) (Muslim)	5
57	Kaura	10
58	Kawar	11

59	Kewat	6
	Keot	
60	Khadwar (only in the district of Sivan and Rohtas)	26
61	Khangar	23
62	Khatik	22
63	Khatwa	24
64	Khatwe	25
65	Khelta	28
66	Khetauri, Khatauri	27
67	Kochh	12
68	Korku	13
69	Kosta, Koshta	21
70	Kumarbhag Pahadia	14
71	Kulahia	125
72	Kurmi	15
	Kurmi (Mahto) (in Chhotanagpur Division only)	
73	Kushwaha (Koeri)	19
74	Laheri	112
75	Madar	100
76	Madari (Muslim)	91
77	Mehtar, }	92
	Lalbegi, } (Muslim)	
	Halalkhor, }	
	Bhangi }	
78	Majhwar	94
79	Malar (Malhar)	95
80	Mali (Malakar)	89
81	Mallah (Surhiya, Kewat Murawari)	90
82	Mangar (Magar)	96
83	Markande	97

84	Maulik	98
85	Mauriario, Mauriara	101
86	Miriasin (Muslim)	93
87	Mirshikar (Muslim)	102
88	Momin (Muslim)	103
89	Mukri (Mukeri) (Muslim)	99
90	Nagar (This does not include Maithili Brahmin and immigrant Nagars from other States who are Brahmin and Baniyas)	128
91	Nai	62
92	Naiya	66
93	Nalband (Muslim)	67
94	Nam <i>Sudra</i>	65
95	Nat (Muslim)	63
96	Nunia, Nonia	64
97	Pahira	74
98	Pal (Bherihar-Gaderi), Gaderia	75
99	Pamaria (Muslim)	68
100	Pandi	70
101	Parya	72
102	Pinganiya	71
103	Pradhan	73
104	Prajapati (Kumbhar)	69
105	Rajbanshi (Risiya and Poliya)	107
106	Rajbhar	105
107	Rajdhobi	106
108	Rangwa	108
109	Rangrez (Muslim)	109
110	Rauttiya	110
111	Rayeen or Kunjra (Muslim)	111
112	Sangatrash (only in the district of Nawadah)	118
113	Sauta (Sota)	115

114	Sayee (Muslim)	116
115	Shekhra	76
116	Shershahbadi	126
117	Shivhari	114
118	Sonar, Sunar	117
119	Sudi, Halwai, Roniyar, Pansari, Modi, Kasera,	83
	Kesarwani, Thathera, Patwa, Sinduriya-Bania,	
	Mahuri-Vaisya, Avadh-Bania, Agraphari-Vaisya	
120	Sukiyar	127
121	Tamariya	50
122	Tamoli, Tamboli	52
123	Tanti (Tatwa), Tati, Tatin	48
124	Teli	53
125	Tharu	54
126	Thakurai (Muslim)	131
127	Tikulhar	45
128	Tiyar	51
129	Turha	49
130	Yadav (Gwala, Ahir, Gope, Sadgope)	104
131	Saikalgar (Sikligar) (Muslim)	129

Data Source: <http://ncbc.nic.in/backward-classes/bihar.html> ON 11 November, 2009

Appendix 3

List of notified Scheduled Castes in Bihar

List of Notified Scheduled Castes, Bihar The Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes Orders (Amendment) Act, 1976	
1. Bantar	13. Halalkhor
2. Bauri	14. Hari, Mehtar, Bhangi
3. Bhogta	15. Kanjar
4. Bhuiya	16. Kurariar
5. Bhumij	17. Lalbegi
6. Chamar, Mochi	18. Mushar
7. Chaupal	19. Nat
8. Dabgar	20. Pan, Swasi
9. Dhobi	21. Pasi
10. Dom, Dhangad	22. Rajwar
11. Dusadh, Dhari, Dharahi	23. Turi
12. Ghasi	

Source: Census of India 2001, Annexure-Ia

Appendix 4

Chronology of Caste carnages in Central Bihar (1976-2001)

Year	Place	District	Attackers' Caste/Class	Victims' Caste/Class	Casualty
1976	Akodi	Bhojpur	Upper backward/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
1977	Belchi	Patna	Upper	SC/agri. labourers	14

			backward/landlords		
	Kargha	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Brahampur	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/middle peasants	4
1978	Kaila	Jehanabad	Upper backward/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
1979	Samhauta	Rohtas	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Bajitpur	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
1980	Pipra	Patna	Upper backward/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	14
	Parasbigha	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste/agri. labourers	11
1981	Mathila	Bhojpur	Police	Liberation cadres	3
1982	Maini Bigha	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
1983	Panania	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	5
1984	Gagan Bigha	Rohtas	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Ambari	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Danwar-Bihta	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	22
	Kharakpura	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Lorik Sena	SC/agri. labourers	6
1985	Kaithi Bigha	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	10
	Kunai	Bhojpur	Police	Liberation cadres	2
1986	Neelampur	Gaya	Haare Ram group/Lorik Sena	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Gaini	Aurangabad	Upper	SC/agri. labourers	12

			caste/landlords		
	Aminabad	Jehanabad	Upper caste/Brahmarshi Sena	Muslims/Beedi workers	3
	Jeenpura	Patna	Ramanand Yadav group/Lorik Sena	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Arwal	Jehanabad	Police	MKSS cadres	24
	Kansara	Jehanabad	Upper caste/Brahmarshi Sena	Backward caste/agri. labourers	8
	Parasdih	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Satyanendra Sena	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Darmian	Aurangabad	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landlord	11
1987	Chotki-Chhechani	Aurangabad	Upper caste/Satyanendra Sena	Upper backward/Middle peasants	7
	Dalelchak-Bhagaura	Aurangabad	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landlord	52
1988	Narhan	Jehanabad	Upper backward/dacoits	Upper backward/poor peasants	4
1989	Nonhi-Nagwan	Jehanabad	Ramashish-Rajdev group/Nagwan	Upper backward SC/agri. Labourers	18
	Daumha	Jehanabad	Ramashish-Rajdev group/Nagwan	Upper backward SC/agri. Labourers	9
1990	Dariyapur	Patna	Upper backward/Kisan Sangh	SC/agri. Labourers	5
1991	Tiskhora	Patna	Upper backward/Kisan Sangh	SC/agri. Labourers	15

	Dev-Sahara	Bhojpur	Upper caste/Jwala Singh group	SC/agri. Labourers	15
	Savanbiga	Jehanabad	Swarna Liberation Front/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	7
	Theendiha	Gaya	Sunlight Sena/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	7
	Mein-Barsima	Gaya	Swarna Liberation Front/upper caste	SC/agri. Labourers	10
1992	Bara	Gaya	Upper backward/middle peasants	Upper caste/landowners	34
	Chainpur	Rohtas	Police	PU cadres	4
	Ashabigha	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	6
1993	Dadar	Rohtas	Police	Liberation cadres	3
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
1994	Aghoura	Rohtas	Police	Party Unity	4
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	Police	Liberation cadres	9
	Matgharna	Gaya	Police	MCC	11
1995	Khopira	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Sarathua	Bhojpur	do	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Gulzarbiga	Aurangabad	Police	PU Cadres	4
1996	Chandi	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Pathalpara	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	3
	Mathanbiga	Aurangabad	Police	MCC cadres	7
	Nanaur	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	5
	Nadhi	Bhojpur	CPI-ML cadres	Upper caste/landlords	8

	Nadhi	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	9
	Morath	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Bathanitola	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC and Muslims/agri. labourers	22
	Purhara	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Khanet	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	5
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
1997	Khanet	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Machil	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Haibaspur	Patna	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	10
	Akhopur	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	4
	Jalpura	Patna	PU cadres	Upper caste/landlords	11
	Indo	Patna	Police	PU cadres	6
	Ekwari	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri- labourers	10
	K-hadasin	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	8
	K-odihara	Patna	Police	PU cadres	2
	Katesar Nala	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	6
	Lakshmanpur-Bathe	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	58
	Chauram	Jehanabad	CPI(ML) Liberation	Upper caste/landlords	9

1998	Nagri	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	10
	Aiyara	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	3
	Sigori	Gaya	Police	MCC	6
	Rampur-Aiyara	Jehanabad	PU cadres	Upper caste/landlords	7
	Mahadevbigha	Gaya	Police	MCC cadres	4
1999	Shankarbigha	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	23
	Narayanpur	Jehanabad	Upper caste/landlords	SC/agri. labourers	11
	Usri Bazar	Jehanabad	Liberation cadres	Upper caste/landlords	7
	Bheempura	Jehanabad	PW cadres	Upper caste/landlords	4
	Senari	Jehanabad	MCC cadres	Upper caste/landlords	35
	Sujathpur	Buxar	Police	Liberation cadres	16
	Sendani	Gaya	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste & SC	12
2000	Lakhisarai	Lakhisarai	Backward caste/Contractors	SC/Sand workers	11
	Rajebigha	Nawada	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste/Middle farmers	5
	Afsar	Nawada	Backward caste/Middle farmers	Upper caste landlords	12
	Mianpur	Aurangabad	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste and SC	35
	Dumariyan	Bhojpur	Upper caste/landlords	Backward caste and SC	6
2001	Chironichi bigha	Gaya	MCC cadres	Police	6
	Kariambura	Jehanabad	Police	PW cadres	5

Data Source: Louis, Prakash. *“People Power: The Naxalite Movement in Central Bihar”*, New Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002, Table 8.8, pp.242-246. ON December 11, 2009 <<http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/terroristoutfits/massacres.htm>>

Appendix 5

Terms of Reference of the First Backward Class Commission (1953)

- (a) To determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any sections of the people in the territory of India (in addition to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes specified by notifications issued under the Article 341 and 342 of the Constitution) should be treated as socially and educationally backward classes; and, in accordance with such criteria, prepare a list of such classes setting out also their approximate number and their territorial distribution
- (b) To investigate the conditions of all such socially and educationally backward classes and the difficulties under which they labour; and make recommendations (i) as to the steps that should be taken by the Union or any State to remove such difficulties or improve their conditions; and (ii) as to the grants that should be made for the purpose by the Union or any State and the conditions subject to which such grants should be made
- (c) To investigate such other matters as the President may hereafter refer to them and
- (d) To present to the President a Report setting out the facts as found by them and making such recommendations as they think proper

The committee submitted its report to the President of India on March 31, 1955 which among other things made the following recommendations:

- (i) That caste was the main cause of backwardness of the OBCs
- (ii) That after taking into consideration the social position which a community occupied in the social hierarchy, the percentage of literacy and its general educational advancement; and its representations in the government service or in the industrial and other economic spheres, 2399 castes comprising about 32 percent population stood at a low level in the Indian society as OBCs

- (iii) That women and backward communities among the Muslims, Christians, etc. be also treated as OBCs
- (iii) That to bring these people to the national mainstream, reservation of 70 per cent seats in all technical and professional institution for their qualified sons and daughters be made
- (iv) That special economic measures be taken to uplift the OBCs economically through such programmes as extensive land reforms, reorganisation of village economy, Bhoochan movement, development of livestock, dairy farming, cattle insurance, bee-keeping, piggy, fisheries, development of rural housing, public health and rural water supply, adult literacy programme, etc. and
- (vi) That to enable the OBCs to come on a par with the high castes in the government/local bodies services, the following reservations be made for them for some time: Class I : 25 %, Class II & III : 33 1/3 % and Class IV : 40 %.

The report identified membership of the lower caste the main cause and common denominator of social backwardness. The then government of India rejected the report on the ground that the recognition of caste on the basis of membership will all but perpetuate the age old social evil which otherwise will become irrelevant with time and acceptance of modern values. Twenty-five years later the second Backward Class Commission was set up in 1978 under the chairmanship of BP Mandal, an OBC (Yadava) leader of Bihar who also served a short stint as the Chief Minister of the state for a month during February to March 1968. The Mandal Commission submitted its report in 1982 to the Congress government in which it identified 3,743 castes in India as OBCs and stated their population to be 52% of the total population. It thus, recommended 27% reservation for the OBCs in the government services. The report was implemented by the VP Singh government in 1990 which was later extended to admission in the institutions of higher learning as well. It became a major source of caste conflict in the state and elsewhere on the social plain which had deep political implications. As far as Bihar is concerned, against the 49.5% reservation (27% for OBC and 22.5% for the SC) recommended by the Mandal Commission, the state already had in place 50% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions as per the following structure:

1. Women – 3%
2. Backward Classes – 8%
3. Extremely Backward Classes – 12%
4. Scheduled Castes – 14%
5. Scheduled Tribes – 10% and
6. Economically Backward Upper Castes – 3%



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